

## **Followers of the Way**

### **TRANSFORMED THROUGH WATCHING, WAITING AND PRAYING**

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We are going to look at this amazing Book of Habakkuk through three different lenses this morning; watching, waiting and praying.

Waiting - I'm sure we would all agree waiting for something is not always easy. It is difficult to exercise patience. When I was a little girl growing up on the farm with my Granny, Dad and Mum, I loved when my Uncle telephoned to say that the family was coming to visit. If he said they were coming tomorrow that was good but if they were coming tonight, that was perfect. I loved a visit from my Uncle, Aunt and 3 cousins. They were usually late in arriving and my Mum and I would go upstairs and WATCH out the window, patiently WAITING. I'm sure Mum was PRAYING that they would come soon to enjoy the lovely meal she had prepared for them. There was great rejoicing when we eventually saw the car approaching our house!

Unique among the prophetic Books, Habakkuk does not so much bring the word of God to the people; rather he brings the words of the people to God. The first two chapters of the Book of Habakkuk contain two complaints from the Prophet and the Lord answers both of these complaints and then in ch.3 we have Habakkuk's prayer.

The Prophet Habakkuk had become impatient and cried out to God in 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?'

We are not told very much about Habakkuk but he possibly ministered during the reign of King Jehoiakim, around 607 B.C. The end of ch.3 gives a hint that he was possibly a Levite, one who led worship in the temple. He pens this amazing song of praise and worship to God in vv.17-19. We also see that at the end of ch.3 it says, 'For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.' He had lived through a period where there had been national revival but sadly it was followed by a time of spiritual decline. There was the Babylonian invasion firstly in 605 B.C. and the total destruction of Judah's capital city, Jerusalem in

586 B.C. Habakkuk looks at the violence and injustice in the nation of Judah and realises that sin is prevalent and the people had become very disobedient towards God. He just could not understand why God was not stepping into this terrible situation to put things right again. He asks God in 1:3, 'Why do You make me look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrong?'

An often repeated phrase that the older generation says is, 'The world is getting worse, it was never like this in our young day.' Even to people of any age, it is obvious that we are living through a time when our world situation can identify with this statement.

Morality has stooped to an all time low. Laws have been passed to allow people to live as they please. Children are confused as to their sexuality. The unborn and the elderly are treated in an inhuman way. The number of earthquakes, famines and wars seem to be escalating all the time. To come a little closer to home, just a few weeks ago was the horrendous murder of a school teacher out for a run in a park in Southern Ireland. Many women are afraid to go out alone at night. Is it any wonder people ask, 'What is the world coming to?' Yet the writer of Ecclesiastes tells us there is nothing new under the sun.

Although I have read this Book of Habakkuk before, I did not know very much about it. As I have been studying more into the text, I sense it has much to say to our current situation we find ourselves living through. Habakkuk's name means 'someone who embraces'; a very appropriate name - he was demonstrating his great love for the people of God and it also shows that he is secure in the love of God. Habakkuk may have lived at the end of King Josiah's reign. He was a just and righteous King caring for the poor and needy. But his son, Jehoiakim who became king, was very different from his father.

Habakkuk is so concerned about the evilness of the people and the violence that raged. There is bribery, corruption and lawlessness in the streets of Jerusalem. People do not feel safe to walk the streets at night alone. Doesn't it sound a familiar situation to us? He is deeply concerned and burdened about this situation.

Sadly, we read of violence away back in Genesis which has been escalating down through the centuries and generations since. Habakkuk knows that those who should have upheld the law had become corrupt. Those in authority ignored the law, they were full of pride and needed to be humbled and, despite all the evil that was happening, even the righteous people were

afraid to speak out because they were surrounded by so many wicked people. Isn't this exactly what is happening within our society and government in the 21 century?

Habakkuk is just so overwhelmed by the cruelty of the Babylonians and he is greatly distressed regarding the situation of society that he comes before God directly and pours out what is on his heart to Him.

Habakkuk felt that God was not intervening in this very disturbing situation. He could not comprehend why God (as he thought) was not doing anything about this evilness. It seems perfectly logical that he asks God in 1:3, 'Why do You tolerate wrong?' The Lord's answer to this first prayer of Habakkuk is that He wanted him to understand what was happening around him.

In 1:5. The Lord says, 'Look at the nations and WATCH..' He was to open his eyes and be observant to take in all he could see. He also said he was in for a huge surprise.

He told him he had planned something that would happen in his lifetime. He did not tell him the whole story because he would not believe it. God was already at work but Habakkuk had to be patient in WAITING. Then Habakkuk makes his second complaint, but notice this time how he addresses Him. He does so now with the personal pronoun of my God, 1:12. He knows Him in an intimate way. He is totally depending on God alone to step in to resolve this difficult situation.

He knows God is from everlasting to everlasting and he has enough faith and trust to realise nothing is going to happen to him and this is so evident when he says, 'O Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die..' but he still cannot fathom why He is still tolerating this wickedness. He thinks God is silent.

God has this situation fully under His divine control and He is interested in how Habakkuk felt and answers him again. Even though God was fully at work, Habakkuk could not recognise it just yet. In Babylon events were happening that would change history. God responded in a way that Habakkuk would not have envisioned. Habakkuk wanted God to bring revival, for the wicked leaders to be judged and for the nations to escape judgement. God had warned the people time and time again but they refused to listen and hardened their hearts. Now is the time for God to act. The Babylonians would be raised up to punish and bring judgment on the people of Judah.

Babylon glorified herself by demeaning others. Habakkuk could not understand why God would allow another nation more wicked than Judah to bring judgment.

Habakkuk is very confused and puzzled. He knows that if the Babylonians came to Jerusalem they would be so ruthless nothing would be left. He just could not believe what was about to take place. Was he doubting God's plans? His next step is to go up and STAND and WATCH and WAIT at the watchtower of Jerusalem and keep his eyes and ears open to receive God's answer for this dreadful situation.

God wanted Habakkuk to contemplate over everything in his mind and he eventually realised that his own view was limited but that God was able to see the bigger picture, the meta narrative, and he trusted God that everything would work out for good. He was now developing great confidence in God. God did not want Habakkuk to sit around and watch and do nothing, rather He told him to write down this revelation on tablets and warn the people what was about to take place. He was told that no matter how long it took, he was to be patient and it would come to pass. In 2:3 God tells Habakkuk, '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.'

Surely this was great assurance for Habakkuk. God told him that 'the righteous will live by faith'. This was the central theme of the Apostle Paul's teaching. This is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus by whose death and resurrection our sins are forgiven and His righteousness received by faith when we put our trust in Him. In ch.3 Habakkuk's mind is in the right attitude and bursts forth in PRAYER and PRAISE to God.

In the short term, however, the Babylonians were punished for their wicked and evil ways. In 2:17 God promised, "The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you..." God was not blind to what had been happening. He had everything under his control.

In this short book of Habakkuk of only three chapters we see such a dramatic change in his life. At the beginning he has so many questions, complaints and is so concerned about the sinfulness of the people. In 1:2 he posed the question, 'O Lord, how long?' Then in 2:3 God said, 'If it seems slow, WAIT for it'. God told him to look at what was happening and assured him that He would make everything right. Habakkuk possessed the right attitude and walked by faith

trusting in what God had promised to him. He realized what God had been doing for His people down through the centuries and he recognized His awesome power over nations. In 3:2, he writes, '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 knew God had intervened in the past and would do so again, but he had to exercise patience in this time of WAITING. In 3:16 Habakkuk is able to say, 'Yet I will WAIT patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.' He was so impatient at the start when he was upset with the situation around him and poured his heart out to God.

Through his times of PRAYING and questioning to God he was transformed into a relaxed and expectant servant of God. He was willing to listen to what God had to say to him and accepted it and then he was able to understand what God said would come to pass. He displayed true faith and unending hope in God and knew he could trust Him completely to fulfil His promises.

G. Campbell Morgan says 'That when Habakkuk looked at his circumstances he was perplexed, but when he waited for God and listened to Him, he sang one of the greatest songs in the Bible.'

Habakkuk says in this song of praise, in 3:18, '... I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.' I read recently that 'Quiet patience is the proper atmosphere for true joy.' He finished by saying in 3:19, 'The Sovereign LORD is my strength.' This is the reason he had such hope and confidence for the future.

Each of us has so much we can learn from this great Prophet Habakkuk. I am sure I can rightly assume that each one of us here is exasperated at the violence, evilness, and sinfulness that is going on throughout the world. Habakkuk rightly states, '...in wrath remember mercy.'

In our state of frustration do we follow the example of Habakkuk to go directly to God in PRAYER and share what is on our hearts? We want revival but it must start with personal revival, with you and me!

PRAYER is a powerful weapon in the armoury that the Christian possesses and needs to be put into practise. Paul emphasises this in Ephesians 6:18, '... PRAY in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on PRAYING for all the saints.'

We can pray at home, join in the Prayer breakout room after the service on a Sunday morning and bring our concerns to God.

Just like in the days of Habakkuk may we learn to be patient, possessing this wonderful Fruit of the Spirit and WAIT on the Lord as David also encourages us in Psalm 27:14 and be in a constant stage of WATCHING.

Jesus asked His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, in His greatest hour of need to WATCH and PRAY. We need to be silent to hear God speaking to us in these days.

As we are WATCHING, WAITING and PRAYING may we rejoice knowing and experience the truth of what the Apostle Paul assures us in Romans 8:28, '...that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.