

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
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Dee McIntosh  
Habakkuk  
Habakkuk 2:1-5**

Good morning, CPC! How is everybody on this beautiful day? It's gorgeous, isn't it? I'm always in shock when summer actually visits us. It's really hard getting through the wintertime. I wonder, why do people live here? I'm from Florida originally and I think all of you native Minnesotans are absolutely insane. But then you get to the summertime and you realize why people stay here, why people live here, because it's gorgeous right now. I talk to my mom in Florida all the time and she goes, "You don't really want to come visit. It's like 100 degrees every day and then it rains at the end of every afternoon." And I think, this is why I live in Minnesota. But find me in the wintertime and I will say, "You guys are insane. You're absolutely insane."

My name is Dee McIntosh and I'm on staff here. It is amazing to be with you this morning. The last time I was up here, I shared a story about my old track running days. It was really cool because after I shared the story, so many of you laughed and laughed and a few weeks after that, people were still coming up to me telling me how funny the story was. But today we are talking about the prophets, so all laughter and humor ends right now. It's time to be serious. The prophets aren't really funny people, are they? No, not really. When I think about the prophets, I always think I never would have liked to have been a friend of a prophet. I mean, it's too much drama. People hate them. They try to stone them. They spit at them. So I'm not really a fan of the prophets.

Today we are going to talk about the prophet Habakkuk. Show of hands, how many of you have ever heard of Habakkuk? Anyone? Whoa! I asked the Saturday service yesterday and I got a half of a hand. You know, when someone might have heard so they give the half-hand gesture maybe. Amazing! So I guess there is no need to say that Habakkuk can be found between the prophets Nahum and Zephaniah because you guys already know where Habakkuk is. Some of you are shaking your heads like, "No, actually I don't really know where Habakkuk can be found."

Habakkuk is a prophet in the Old Testament. He is considered to be one of the 12 minor prophets. His book is only three chapters long and is really more of a journal than it is a book. But I believe that Habakkuk, even though he is considered to be a minor prophet, has a major message for us this morning. Amen? So before we jump into Habakkuk, I'm going to give you a little bit of a background and then an overview, okay?

**So this is the background.** The background is that we don't actually know very much about Habakkuk. In fact, the only reason why we know he is a prophet is because the first verse of the book begins like this.

1 [This is] The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw.

That is how we know he's a prophet. I searched through commentaries and did all of this research and they all say the same thing. "We have no idea who this man is. We just know he is a prophet because the Bible says so." This is pretty much all we know about the status of this prophetic character.

So, let me give you a little bit on the background of the Israelites. They are not following God's laws, His rules and ordinances, and are facing a time of turmoil. We believe that Habakkuk lived somewhere between 612 BC and 605 BC, right before Babylonian forces, the bad guys of the Old Testament, sacked the Israelites. We know that prior to Habakkuk, Judah experienced a revival under the rule of King Josiah. He was a just and a righteous king. He was the king who found the hidden scrolls in the temple. Judah experienced a revival during his reign and the people of Judah served God faithfully, but as soon as King Josiah died, Judah returned to its wicked ways.

So that is our background. **The overview of Habakkuk** is less of an overview of a book and more like the overview of a journal. This is an intimate conversation between Habakkuk and God and that is what makes this particular text so unique. This is how the conversation goes.

[Habakkuk:] God, do You know what You are doing?

[God responds:] Yes, I do and here is my plan.

[Habakkuk:] That's your plan? Seriously God, are You sure you know what You are doing?

[God responds:] Yes, I do.

[Habakkuk:] Well, I guess that the just shall have to live by faith.

So now that we have the background and the overview, let's go ahead and jump right in, picking up in verse 2.

<sup>2</sup> O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,  
and you will not listen?  
Or cry to you "Violence!"  
and you will not save?

<sup>3</sup> Why do you make me see wrongdoing  
and look at trouble?  
Destruction and violence are before me;  
strife and contention arise.

<sup>4</sup> So the law becomes slack  
and justice never prevails.  
The wicked surround the righteous—  
therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

We have at the very beginning of this book, Habakkuk protesting before the Lord. Habakkuk did not like the way things were going. He did not understand why God would let the Israelites prosper while they were living in such opposition to God's will and His way. They were leading lives of sin. According to Habakkuk, the people had given themselves over to envy, murder, and craftiness. They were gossipers and slanderers, boastful and filled with vain ambition. The

people were faithless, heartless, and corrupt. For Habakkuk, not only were the people and families messed up, not only was the culture messed up, the government and the religious systems, the very systems God had put in place to enact justice, were also perverted. So people who would go to seek justice were not getting the justice they sought after.

Habakkuk challenges God about God's role in all of this, and boldly might I add. It is always risky when the created questions the motivations of the Creator, but for Habakkuk, it was a risk he was willing to take. You see, Habakkuk was facing times much like we are today. I think many of us question whether God is truly aware of everything that is going on. We can't even turn on the TV without getting more news of strife, war, abuse, terrorism, and murder. I don't know about you, but I absolutely hate turning on the news. I get this instant dreadful feeling the moment I turn to whatever channel it is, 11, 4, 10, 267. We have so many channels now. But the moment I turn on the news, it is very difficult for me to sit through more than five minutes because the only thing I ever see is strife and murder and crime. You never really hear about the good stories that are actually happening. We only ever talk about the bad ones.

I think that Habakkuk's message back then in 600 BC is very similar to what we need to hear today in 2015. I have some images I want to show you. Now, there are children in here so I want to say that this is the warning in case you want to cover your children's eyes.

[Slides shown.]

These images over the last hundred years display the atrocities and brokenness of our world. The earliest picture on there is from 1930. Those are just a few glimpses into the last 85 years around the world. There are pictures that are far worse than that. There are stories that could bring all of us to our knees. It is hard to imagine in the face of such brokenness that God is working still. It is hard to look at pictures like that and think that God is actually working in our world. It's hard to hear about the crimes of a young man who goes and sits for an hour-long time in prayer and decides to shoot nine people. It is really difficult to believe that God is still here, that He actually cares.

This is what Habakkuk is thinking in his own time. The Israelites are corrupt. People aren't getting the justice that they need and so that radical Habakkuk takes God on. He pits God's character against God's action, essentially saying, "If You are a God who is just, how is it that You sit in the midst of injustice? If You are a God who is righteous, how is it that You can endure unrighteousness?"

So, remember I gave you the overview? I said that Habakkuk questions God and says, "God, do You know what You are doing?" Do you remember that I said that God's response was "Yes"? I find it interesting that God doesn't respond to Habakkuk and say, "I am God. I don't have to tell you anything." Instead God responds and He says, "You're right. There are terrible things going on." And beginning in verse 5, God says this.

<sup>5</sup> "Look around at the godless nations.  
Look long and hard. Brace yourself for a shock.  
Something's about to take place  
and you're going to find it hard to believe.  
I'm about to raise up Babylonians to punish you . . . .

Now, I don't think this is the response that Habakkuk was going for at all. God is saying to Habakkuk, "I am going to bring a nation more ruthless, more terrible than you, to conquer you and they are going to be your judgment." God goes on, "Yes, they are a fearsome and dreadful bunch and they are going to lord it over you." Can you imagine that? Habakkuk says, "God, I need justice" and God says, "Think of the biggest, baddest criminal in the history of the world. He is going to be your justice." Habakkuk is confused. I think more than confused. He says that God is crazy. Habakkuk says,

<sup>12-13</sup> GOD, you're from eternity, aren't you?  
Holy God, we aren't going to die, are we?  
GOD, you chose *Babylonians* for your judgment work?  
Rock-Solid God, you gave *them* the job of discipline?  
But you can't be serious!  
You can't condone evil!  
So why don't you do something about this?  
Why are you silent *now*?  
This is an outrage! Evil men swallow up the righteous  
and you stand around and *watch!*

There can be nothing more terrible than being the guy who goes to God and complains and then have God answer your complaint in this way. What's worse is that Habakkuk is a prophet. He's the guy responsible for telling the people that the Babylonians are coming. This is why people always hate the prophets. They always bring bad news. I mean, people already hate the prophets. This is a message that could surely get him killed. Habakkuk declares he is going to go up to the watchtower and wait for God's response. I think Habakkuk doesn't actually believe that God is going to bring the Babylonians against the house of Judah.

**2** I will stand at my watchpost,  
and station myself on the rampart;  
I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,  
and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

God responds in this way.

**2** Then the LORD answered me and said:  
Write the vision;  
make it plain on tablets,  
so that a runner [those who take the vision to the people] may read it.  
**3** For there is still a vision for the appointed time;  
it speaks of the end, and does not lie.  
If it seems to tarry, wait for it;  
it will surely come, it will not delay.

This is essentially God saying, "Yup, I'm completely serious." But notice here that God says that the vision of His justice will speak to the end. What is going on here? What does this mean? We don't have Babylonians anymore, do we? We don't have Chaldeans. This is not how we refer to people anymore, so how can a vision given in 600 BC carry now into 2015? There is something profound going on here. That zealous prophet Habakkuk wanted God's justice. This is the whole reason why he was proclaiming and protesting to the Lord, but I think what Habakkuk got rather

than God's judgment was His mercy. It's hard to think about God in the Old Testament as a merciful God because of all the wars and the battles and all of the exile, but here is the blessing of exile. This is what Roman's 6:23 tells us.

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The wages of sin or the consequences of sin is death. A single sin is worth death. I believe this to mean eternal death, what we like to call hell. We don't really talk about hell in church, do we? And if we do talk about it, there are a lot of myths around hell, right? It's this fiery pit where we are going to burn for all eternity. But you know what? There is something far scarier than sitting in a pit of fire for all eternity and that is facing an eternity that is absent of God. That is what hell is. It is to come into the knowledge of love, joy, peace, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and gentleness, to know that which is pure and good and then to spend the rest of eternity never again experiencing it. Friends, that is death. That is what our sin deserves. That is what our punishment should be. But rather than give the Israelites the punishment they deserved, God brought them the mercy of exile.

This is why I believe that the God of the New Testament is the same God as the God of the Old Testament, because the God of the New Testament's mercy is the same mercy we see in the Old Testament. A single sin is worth death and yet God says to Habakkuk, "I'm just going to bring a worse nation and you're going to be in exile for a couple of years and then you'll come out."

We often think that God is not working toward justice, especially when we watch the news or think of our own lives. I think that's funny and I think this is something to say more against millennials than any other generation. I am a millennial. Millennials have a severe intolerance for injustice. We can't stand it whenever injustice comes our way. We are fighting against injustice, but we are surprisingly tolerant of sin. The two contradict themselves and here is what I mean. We are very intolerant when it comes to human trafficking and sex trafficking but we rarely ever talk about lust in the church. We rarely ever talk about fornication because all of that is relative now. We love to talk about hunger and poverty and the injustices of them. We will rush to go overseas to save other people, but we never talk about gluttony and I don't mean just gluttony. I mean gluttony of resources. We never talk about vain ambition, do we? Americans definitely don't talk about vain ambition and greed because we are a successful nation and how dare we talk about some of the things that might actually bring that to bear! But the Bible makes it clear that God is not slack as some would consider him. He is longsuffering. He is merciful, seeing that none of us get what we deserve. Here is what it says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter about God's ultimate and enduring justice.

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance [2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:9].

No one in this room will get what we actually deserve and that message is in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. I believe that this is the justice that Habakkuk is talking about, justice that speaks to the end and does not lie. God in His mercy and grace chose to die on a cross in order that we may all, Israelites and Babylonians just the same, the Dee McIntosh's in the world as well as each of you, would be saved through the proclamation that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Remember the overview I gave you at the beginning? Habakkuk said, “God, do you know what You are doing?” And God says, “Yes.” And Habakkuk says, “I think that’s a terrible plan. Are You sure?” And God says, “Yes.”

<sup>4</sup>“Look at that man, bloated by self-importance—  
full of himself but soul-empty.  
But the person in right standing before God  
through loyal and steady believing  
is fully alive, *really* alive [Habakkuk 2:4].

What did I say Habakkuk’s response was? The just shall live by faith. I think that here Habakkuk realizes that God, the God of history, has always been working toward His ultimate plan and that plan is not as simple as Habakkuk would have hoped. Habakkuk wanted people to get justice right there. He wanted people to get what they deserved. Habakkuk is probably like me. If you ever see me driving in traffic, watch out. I get really, I don’t know if I can say the word I want to say up here, but I get really pissy. There, I said it. I am not the nicest person, sitting in traffic. My temper starts flaring. I get really upset and the moment someone cuts me off, I think, I wish there was a police officer right there in this moment, a state trooper, so that person can get what they deserve. Anybody else feel like that? Yeah, I knew I wasn’t going to be the only one.

We often think about justice as people getting what they deserve. If a man walks into a room and kills everybody, then what that man deserves is death, right? Isn’t that what we uphold? But the reality is, saints of God, that we are all sinners. Every single one of us in this room, every single person in all of history, apart from Jesus, deserves death and this is why I think the cross of Jesus Christ is so important. This is why the Gospel message is so important, not just for us but for everyone in this world, that God is faithful and loving and merciful and doesn’t give us what we deserve. He gives us His love and His mercy and His grace instead.

I find it difficult to talk about sin in the church because church people don’t actually like to talk about sin. I won’t talk for you guys, I’ll talk for myself. I don’t like to talk about sin because I would rather that everyone would think I am perfect. I’m quite amazing. I mean, I get as close as you can possibly get to perfection. I think I’m just behind the line and I want everyone to love me and think that I am great. I want everyone to think that I am funny but I don’t want to think about the parts of me that aren’t so great, that aren’t so funny, the parts of me that hurt other people, the parts of me that are envious of other people so that I compare myself to the detriment of myself, the parts of me that actually are filled with hatred toward others. I never really want to focus on those things. I’d rather stand up on the mountain, the tower that Habakkuk stood on, and point to other people and say, “God, may Your justice fall on them.” When I think about the men and women who own and operate human trafficking rings, I want to stand in my tower high above, in my high place, and point to them and say, “God, may Your justice fall down on them.”

I’ve got to be honest. When that man walked into that church and sat for an hour of prayer and still decided to shoot and kill nine people, I wanted to say, “God, may Your justice fall down on him.” And then I have to think about myself. I have to think about those times when I hurt other people. I have to think about those times when I’ve said some not very nice words while driving on the highway. I have to think about all those times when I was envious or I was greedy or I was filled with vain ambition and you know what I realized? I realized that God is sitting up

above us. He is sitting up above me in His heavenly place on His throne and His character of justice actually demands justice. I realized that as God sits up there and I'm down here in my sin, God's justice is pointing at me saying, "May My justice be done on her." But, oh, saints, it is at that moment when Jesus steps out in front of me and stretches His arms out wide, His arms bearing the markers of the nails that went into His wrists and His ankles, and He says, "No, not that one. Not because of anything that Dee does, but because of everything that I do, My blood washes her clean and covers her."

I think that people don't like the church, not necessarily because the church is the light of the world, but because we have spent far too much time sitting up in our high places, pointing at everyone else, proclaiming justice on them. I don't think we do a very good job of pointing back at ourselves and saying, "Look at my own sin. Look at how gracious and merciful God has been to me because it has nothing to do with me and everything to do with the blood of the lamb." Amen?

All right, so I am going to try something new before we go into Communion. We are going to try **an application and it is going to be three parts**. There are three things that I think if you don't take anything else away from this message, that I want you to take away. I am going to boil down this whole 20-minute spiel into three things.

1. The first is to recognize that none of us gets what we deserve. The Bible puts it this way. Lest anyone should boast, God in His righteousness justifies us all simply because of our faith.

2. The second is to recognize and to name our own sin. This is where I'm going to lose a lot of people. "What do you mean I have to recognize and name it?" In the black church, we say *name it and claim it*. Okay, so we are going to name it and you claim it, all right? I'll give you an example of who did this really well. King David was the greatest king to have ever graced the earth. But King David had a few shadow sides, a few things he wasn't the greatest at. I'm not going to talk about all of them; I'm just going to talk about one. David was a very lust-filled man. The Bible tells us that he had a man killed in order that he might sleep with that dead man's wife. King David was the same king whose advisors and counselors knew he was sick and near death because when they put a virgin in his bed, he didn't touch her. It's in there. It's in the Bible. And yet do you know what God said of David? That he was a man after God's own heart. Do you know why? It's because when David came to faith and to grips with his sin, what did David do? He tore off his clothes and went before the Lord and he named what his sin was. He didn't say, "Oh, God, forgive me for those sins I did back then." He named it.

3. And the second thing David did, and this is going to be the third thing on our list, he repented. Repentance is not about feeling guilty and ashamed. Repentance literally means just to turn away from the old way. That's what repentance means. Repentance is to turn away from the sin and to reorient ourselves toward God. It is to put God back at the center of our lives. Amen?

All right! Now we are going to move into Communion. It's a wonderful sacrament we get an opportunity to partake in, but I'd like to take a moment of silence before we begin to practice this application that I gave. In the silence we are going to first recognize that we do not ever get what we deserve. Second, we are going to practice naming and claiming our sin. And the third thing will be, we will just repent. After a moment of silence, I will pray for us and then we will begin Communion.

[Pause.]

Father God, we thank You that You are a merciful and just God. We thank You that You are the same God in the Old Testament as You were in the New Testament as You are now. You are the God of yesterday and today. We are grateful, God, that Your ultimate justice is to see that we would all be forgiven, that we would all be reconciled back to You. So, Father God, as we partake in Communion, this holy sacrament, may we remember the sacrifice of Your Son. May we remember that His blood covers us all. We are grateful, so very grateful, God. In Jesus Christ's Name, we pray. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*