**THE RIGHTEOUS AND THEIR FAITH**

**(Habakkuk 1-3)**

I want to ask you a question. I’ll warn you; it is a personal question. It may bother you. If it does, that means you need to deal it. The question is this: Are you righteous? I didn’t say *self-righteous.* I said *righteous.* I am not asking:

* Are you nice?
* Are you honest?
* Are you good?
* Are you religious?
* Do you go to church?

Are you righteous? It might help to have a definition. A person who is righteous is one who enjoys a right standing with God. God and the righteous person are in right relationship with one another.

Here is another warning: If you are not righteous, if you don’t have a right relationship with God, you have a problem, a big problem. There are just two types of people: those who are righteous and those who are wicked. There is not an in-between; just one or the other. If you are not righteous, you are wicked.

According to Jesus, the righteous go away into eternal life while the wicked go away to eternal punishment.

There is another problem. It is even bigger than the problem that the unrighteous have a problem. The bigger problem is that on our own, all of us are unrighteous. Paul wrote in Romans 3:10, “None is righteous, no, no one.”

That means we need to acquire a righteousness that is not native to ourselves. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, “the LORD is our righteousness” (33:16). Isaiah gets a bit more specific:

I will rejoice in the LORD,

My soul will exult in my God;

For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,

He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness.

The NT is clear in teaching that it is our faith in Jesus that makes us righteous. When we trust Jesus, that faith in Him is counted or reckoned to us as righteousness. Jesus Himself is our righteousness. If you have a relationship with Jesus, you are righteous. If you don’t, you aren’t.

Today’s message come from a small book—just three chapters, a mere 56 verses. While the OT book of Habakkuk is small, the influence of the book is huge. It has one verse that is quoted three times in the NT. The words of this particular verse are found in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. That one verse is Habakkuk 2:4, “the righteous shall live by his faith.”

Throughout the book of Habakkuk, the message of this key verse is illustrated. This morning, we are going to look at, “The Righteous and Their Faith.” We are going to pick out several passages from Habakkuk and learn how this book encourages us to live the life of faith.

**I. DESPITE OUR QUESTIONS, THE RIGHTEOUS WAIT IN FAITH.**

Look at 1:2-4. It seems likely that Habakkuk grew up during the reign of King Josiah. Josiah was a godly man, one of the few godly Kings of Judah, and while he was King, he instituted religious reform. The nation responded as he called them back to God. When Josiah died, however, the nation slipped back into idolatry and wickedness.

As Habakkuk looked upon the deplorable state of his nation, he cried out to God. He asked God to do something to stem the tide of their moral and spiritual decline. As far as he could tell, God hadn’t done anything. The nation continued to go from bad to worse; so, Habakkuk asked God, “Why?”

Have you ever been plagued by serious questions? Have you ever been so disturbed by what you have witnessed that you went before God and asked, “Why?” Have you ever complained to God?

If so, you are not alone. In fact, you are in good company. Job was no stranger to *the why question.* It is found through the Book of Job. King David and the other writers of the Book of Psalms routinely used that word *why* as they cried out to God. For instance, in Psalm 10:1 we read, “Why, O LORD, do You stand far off? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?” Jesus Himself even asked why. When He was dying on the cross Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). If you ever ask God *why,* you are in good company. Job did; David did; Habakkuk did, and Jesus did.

Let me warn you, however, that if you ask God *why,* be prepared for Him to answer because He might, and you might not like what He has to say. Habakkuk asked God why He hadn’t done anything, and God basically answered, “Hold your horses; I am just about to do something. I am going to judge My people, and I am going to use the Babylonians to bring that judgment about.”

Habakkuk didn’t like what he heard. God’s answer elicited more questions from the disturbed prophet. Look at 1:13. Habakkuk felt that it wasn’t right for God to use a people more wicked than the Jews to punish God’s people. It didn’t make any sense to him, but he promised to wait on God (2:1).

When you have a problem with what God is up to, and you can’t resolve it, what are you to do? Are you to grumble and complain and fuss and fume? No. Do what Habakkuk did. Entrust it to God. Say, “Lord, I don’t understand, but I will leave this problem with You. I will trust You to answer in Your timing.” When you do that and God doesn’t answer as quickly as You think He should, don’t run back, pick up the problem and wrestle with it more. Leave it there with God. If you keep complaining to other people about your questions, you haven’t left it with God.

I think it is interesting that Habakkuk said, “I will look to see what He will say.” It would seem more natural for him to write, “I will listen to hear what God will say.” I don’t know about you, but I have never heard God speak to me audibly, but I have had God speak to me as I read His word. If you want God to answer your questions, read His word. Look to see what He has already said, and as you do, you may find that He is speaking again, and this time, to you personally.

I like what the Christian singer Steven Curtis Chapman said. He said, “I have learned that we can control where we allow things that we can’t understand to fall. They either fall between us and God, and we become angry. Or we allow these things to fall outside of us and press us in closer to God.”

When you don’t understand what God has done or is doing, don’t let that unanswered question get between you and God. Instead, let it press you closer to Him as you wait on Him, reading His word and spending time with Him in prayer.

Consider the story of Billy Graham. It was the evangelistic rally that he held in 1949 that vaulted Billy Graham to fame and made him a house-hold name. The series of meetings was supposed to last two weeks. They lasted eight weeks. During that time, Graham preached 65 sermons and gave hundreds of evangelistic talks to groups and on the radio. Hundreds of thousands of people heard the gospel during those two months, and thousands had given their lives to Christ.

There was something significant, however, that happened before the evangelistic campaign began. Billy was struggling. He had read what other people were writing about the Bible. He heard what other were saying about the Bible. He had a good friend, Charles Templeton, who many said was a better preacher than Billy, but Templeton quit preaching because he no longer believed in the authority and reliability of the Bible.

Graham spent a few days at a retreat center just east of Los Angeles. In his autobiography, Billy Graham revealed what happened one night at that retreat center.

I got up and took a walk. The moon was out. The shadows were long in the San Bernardino Mountains surrounding the retreat center. Dropping to my knees there in the woods, I opened the Bible at random on a tree stump in front of me. I could not read it in the shadowy moonlight, so I had no idea what text lay before me . . . [He didn’t use the stump as a pulpit. For him, at this moment, it was an altar].

The exact wording of my prayer is beyond recall, but it must have echoed my thoughts: “Oh, God! There are many things in this book I do not understand. There are many problems with it for which I have no solution. There are many seeming contradictions. There are some areas in it that do not seem to correlate with modern science. I can’t answer some of the philosophical and psychological questions Chuck and others are raising.”

At last, the Holy Spirit freed me to say, “Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by *faith!* I’m going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word.”

When I got up from my knees at Forest Home that August night, my eyes sung with tears. I sensed the presence of [power of God as I had not sensed it in months. Not all my questions were answered, but a major bridge had been crossed. In my heart and mind, I knew a spiritual battle in my soul had been fought and won.

Despite the questions you and I may have, if we will simply take God at His word, trust in Him, and wait on Him, He will do amazing things in us and for us and through us.

**II. DESPITE OUR FAILURE, THE RIGHTEOUS LIVE BY FAITH.**

God’s statement in Habakkuk 2:4 that the righteous will live by faith addresses far more than just the fact that we ought to trust God when we don’t understand exactly what He is doing.

Boice wrote, “This is a great text. It could even be called *the* great text of the Bible. To understand it is to understand the Christian gospel and the Christian life.”

As evidence of the statement’s strategic importance to the message of the Bible, not only are those words found in Habakkuk 2:4, they are also found in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. This verse not only tells us how a righteous person lives, it also teaches us how a person becomes righteous—by faith. Righteousness or salvation is a gift—a gift that is received by faith. We cannot earn salvation by our good deeds, nor can we merit it by our superior character. Salvation is wholly a matter of God’s grace, and as such it can only by accepted by faith. It is by faith and faith alone that we trust Christ as Savior and Lord.

Having received salvation by faith, we are to continue to live the saved life by faith in God. The remainder of Habakkuk 2 pronounces woe upon the one who chooses to live life not by faith in God but by faith in self. Look at the beginning of verses 6, 9, 12, 15, and 19. Misery is always the result when a person thinks he/she can live life independently from God. By contrast, the life that is blessed is the one that is lived by faith in God.

It just so happens that Habakkuk 2:4 was used mightily of God to influence an Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther. Many people know that the seeds of the Protestant Reformation were planted when Luther nailed what were called 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517. At the time, Luther was serving as a professor of biblical studies at the University of Wittenberg. Those 95 Theses were 95 complaints that Luther had with the Catholic Church over practices and beliefs that he felt were inconsistent with what the Bible teaches. He protested what he viewed as abuses and errors of the Church. That is where we get the word Protestant.

Earlier in his life, while he was studying at a monastery in Erfurt, Germany, Luther came upon the text, “The righteous will live by faith.” At that time, he didn’t fully understand what the verse meant, but it struck him. It occurred to him that it might be possible to please God in some other way than through fasting, prayer, self-denial, and good works.

Soon before the posting of the 95 Theses, Luther made a pilgrimage to Rome. On the way he fell terribly ill. He was so sick, he thought he was going to die. He wondered what it would be like to stand before the wrath of God. As he pondered this, that text came back to him, “The righteous will live by faith.” He repeated it to himself over and over.

In time Luther recovered, and he continued his journey to Rome. He made his way to the Church of St. John’s Lateran. In that church, there was a staircase that was said to be from Pilate’s judgment hall. The staircase also had bloodstains covered by glass. It was believed that Jesus had left those bloodstains when He stood before Pilate. The Pope had promised that if pilgrims would climb that staircase on their knees, praying as they went and kissing the glass covered bloodstains, then they would automatically be forgiven of their sin.

Luther went to the staircase. He began to climb it on his knees, and he prayed as he went. Years later, Luther’s son Paul Luther wrote, “As he repeated his prayers on the Lateran staircase, the words of the prophet Habakkuk came suddenly to his mind: ‘The just shall live by faith.’ Thereupon he ceased his prayers, returned to Wittenberg, and took this as the chief foundation of all his doctrine.” It was on those stairs that the Reformation began.

Do you need a Reformation to come about in your life? Have you been wondering, “How can I please God? What must I do to earn His favor?” The Bible says, “Trust Him . . . The just shall live by faith.”

There comes a point in everyone’s life when he/she has to make a decision. The question is, “Whom will I trust? Will it be me, or will it be the Lord?” Do you find yourself at that crossroad today?

Some of you are facing questions you have never before encountered. Is the Bible really true? Does God really exist? Is Jesus the only way to heaven? You will have to make a decision to live by faith or live by your own imperfect reason. What will your choice be? I can’t make those decisions for you, but I urge you to trust Christ. I’ve staked my life to my personal conviction that God’s word is true and that there is only one way to heaven and that is by turning from your sin and trusting Jesus as Savior and Lord. If I could do that for you, I would, but I can’t. You have to make that decision yourself. My prayer is that God would help you to do that very thing.

**III. DESPITE OUR TRIALS, THE RIGHTEOUS REJOICE IN FAITH.**

Look at Habakkuk 3:17-19. This was Habakkuk’s declaration of his faith in God. The prophet wasn’t going to base his faith on outward circumstances. It was based on an inward conviction.

Honesty forces us to admit that fear was present in Habakkuk’s heart. Habakkuk heard what God had to say about the coming Babylonian invasion. He knew terrible times would come, and he was fearful. Look at 3:16. Nevertheless, Habakkuk was not going to let fear have the final word; nor was he going to let fear carry the day. He chose to conquer his fear with faith.

We need to remember that a sense of well-being is not based upon what we have but upon Whom we have. As long as we have the Lord, all will be well. What enriches us is not based upon what we possess but upon Who possesses us. It is our faith in the Lord that is the basis of our true wealth.

There is an old spiritual that is one of my favorite songs. The title of that song is, “Give Me Jesus.” The song, which really is a prayer, has three verses. The first says, “In the morning when I rise . . . Give me Jesus.” The second reads, “And when I am alone . . . Give me Jesus.” The third verse pleads, “And when I come to die . . . Give me Jesus.” The text of the chorus is also a plea: “Give me Jesus, give me Jesus; you may have all this world, give me Jesus.”

As long as you and I have Jesus, it does not matter what we do not have.

Almost 38 years ago, back in 1982, on a balmy October afternoon in Madison, Wisconsin, Badger Stadium was packed. More than 60,000 die-hard University of Wisconsin supporters were watching their football team take on the Michigan State Spartans. It soon became obvious that MSU had the better team.

The odd thing was the even though the score was lopsided in favor of the visiting team, there were bursts of applause and shouts of joy coming from the Wisconsin fans. Why were they cheering when their team was losing?

It turns out that seventy miles away, the Milwaukee Brewers were beating the St. Louis Cardinals in game three of the 1982 World Series. Many of the fans in the stands were listening to portable radios—and voicing their approval to something other than their immediate circumstances.

We are instructed in 2 Corinthians 4:18 to fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen. Can you do that? That is what it means to live a life of faith.

Just remember that what we are going through today is not the final chapter.

I close with a quote from Gordon MacDonald:

The old King James translation is, “The just shall live by faith.” I can translate that in another way that will be more comprehensible. “The biblical person, the Christ follower, will live in response, will navigate through life, will make choices and judgments, will develop and form relationships, by his or her faith.” In other words:

* I will live obediently to the expressions of the Word of God.
* I will respond to the impulses of the Holy Spirit.
* I will live in submission to the lordship of Christ.
* I will live by my faith.

These [other] people will choose the road of arrogance; I will choose the road of faith.

Choose that road. Now, you and I, let’s walk that road together—the road of faith.