

Just God

Week 3: Justice and God's Being

- I. Today, we're looking at the end of Habakkuk 1 verses 12-17 and a little bit of Habakkuk 2. Habakkuk was a prophet that lived in the 7th Century B.C. The guy had a really tough job. Most prophets do because God speaks through His prophets and the communication is typically a:

[Slide]: Warning!

A. Habakkuk's world has similarities to our own. There was tension on a global scale. The Babylonians were gaining power in the north and the Egyptians were still the superpower in the south. The Egyptians were on borrowed time, but no one knew that because the prophecy given to Habakkuk was yet to play out. A century prior (8th Century B.C.), the northern kingdom of Israel had already been conquered, but the southern kingdom of Israel, named Judah, still remained.

1. I bring this up because we are quick to forget life lessons that we should retain! Judah had the benefit of seeing what took place when the northern kingdom of Israel took their eyes off God and did right in their own eyes! They were able to have a front row seat to what occurs when a society ceases to do justice and the law becomes paralyzed. Yet, less than a century later, Judah is walking down the same path!
2. I wasn't there so I don't know for certain. But the more time I spend in Habakkuk and think about the parallel passages in 2 Kings 23-24 and Jeremiah, I'm grieved by something. King Josiah did a lot of great things as king. He cleaned house on a wayward culture, but somehow the faith that Josiah died for did not get passed down to his sons. Neither Jehoahaz nor Jehoiakim. I can't speculate as to their specific situation but what I can say firmly is this:

[Slide]: Justice in a society reflects justice in the home.

- a. We want wholesale changes in our society, but we're not teaching the next generation what it means to do justice in the home. If King Josiah missed this, then he missed in a big way! Children must make a personal choice to trust Jesus Christ, but it is our job as parents to teach our children to bend our lives to the book. It's our job to set up a culture in the home in which justice is being pursued and celebrated. A home in which we're living our lives under the authority of God and His word and making it our aim to treat each other with dignity and honor.
- b. We feel more comfortable organizing protests, marches, and political rallies in which we decry some form of injustice, while by and large the American home is rapidly deteriorating. The typical avenues by which we're trying to achieve justice is by addressing symptoms after they arise. If that's going to be our only approach, then we would have an equal amount of success going to Lowe's and buying a 5 gallon bucket and draining the Chesapeake Bay after church. We can do a lot of great things for God, but let the society to which Habakkuk is addressing be a reminder for us. If justice ceases to be administered in the home, it won't be long before injustice takes root in a society.

B. Habakkuk is wrestling with God's justice. He begins by looking at the society of Judah and the systematic injustice from the king and the injustice that is permeating the whole. He doesn't understand why God is failing to execute His justice on the sin that Habakkuk sees plain as day. We've described justice in light of the Bible's definition which means to give others their due or claim. That can be in a retributive sense. Someone has wronged another, and a consequence is due. It can also be giving others their due in a proactive sense. Because every human being bears the image of God, there is a sense of honor and dignity that comes part and parcel to every human life. From the unborn to the grave.

1. Part of our reset on understanding justice from God's perspective has to come from the pairing of justice and righteousness. We do justice not by keeping a scale with our actions compared to the actions of others, but by living rightly before God. That's what righteousness means: doing right by God!
2. Conversely, injustice and sin are always paired together. The injustice that occurs in a society is directly correlated to the pervasiveness of sin. It's really not that complicated. But again, we often work hard to spotlight the sins and injustice occurring around us and do everything we can to keep our sins in the dark.
 - a. Let me give a prime example of how sin and injustice are a package deal more than we think. Let's say I go home this week and decide I'm going to look at a little porn. No big deal. No one will ever know. What's it going to hurt?

One, the connection between the porn industry and human trafficking should break our hearts, but beyond that, if we're married or one day want to be married, then we're doing an injustice to our spouse. We're stripping away what our spouse is due! The honor and respect that God has called us to exhibit to our covenant partner.

C. I know we're rehashing Habakkuk a bit before we get into our main passage, but we need to expand our understanding of justice. It's not an issue "out there" but one that cuts through every human heart. God responds to Habakkuk's cry for justice by giving him an advanced notice on what is about to take place! Last week, we saw that God was raising up the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to bring God's consequences to Judah for the pervasiveness of injustice. God redirected Habakkuk's line of sight!

Habakkuk 1:6 [Slide]: 6 Look! I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter, impetuous nation that marches across the earth's open spaces to seize territories not its own.

1. God puts Habakkuk in his place by letting him know that His plan is already in motion, but like Drake said, "It's God's plan" not his plan. That's the crux of the decision before us even today. God is a just God and He takes note of injustice. He executes His justice against injustice. We may be tempted to look at the world around us and think that injustice is winning the day.

May I also remind us that we may be tempted to look at the injustice in our own hearts and think we're getting away with it, but God always sees and His plan always encompasses us from every side.

2. Habakkuk still doesn't like God's plan, but he chooses to believe that God has a better perspective than he does and opts to lean in!

Habakkuk 1:12-13 [Slide]: 12 Are you not from eternity, LORD my God? My Holy One, you will not die. LORD, you appointed them to execute judgment; my Rock, you destined them to punish us. 13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why do you tolerate those who are treacherous? Why are you silent while one who is wicked swallows up one who is more righteous than himself?

3. There are some things we can question about the justice of God and there are other things we cannot. We've said the biblical definition of justice (mishpat) covers both justice in a retributive sense and justice in a proactive sense: giving others their due. So, what is Habakkuk bent around the axle over? Habakkuk is going to be God's spokesman to the people, but before that, he is wrestling with God primarily around the same question we all really want to ask:

[Slide]: Can I count on God to be just with me?

- a. Now stop for a moment and think deeply about that question. I think if we were honest, our desire would be for God's justice to be administered on our behalf (as it pertains to injustice done us) and God's mercy over our mistakes.
 - b. If we stop and consider God's justice in our lives, it's far more complex and nuanced than we might think. I'm so thankful that God no longer sees me for who I was, but for who I am in Christ! Justification means we've stood guilty before a holy God and been declared "not guilty" because Christ took the penalty on our behalf! But it still doesn't negate the consequences of God's justice when we sin. God executes His justice today even though it's only a foretaste of what's to come. God's justice demands what is due Him. That means we will stand before God on our own merit or in Christ.
4. Habakkuk is looking ahead to God's Anointed One or Messiah; we look back on what God has already done! Habakkuk is wrestling with the justice of God and that's o.k. God can handle our emotions. But if there were characteristics of God that Habakkuk didn't question and he was looking toward God's future faithfulness, how much more should we not question the character of God!
 - a. Habakkuk begins his response to God with a rhetorical question:

Habakkuk 1:12a [Slide]: Are you not from eternity, LORD my God?

Who are we to dictate to God what His justice should entail? He's the Great I AM sitting on His throne from eternity past and will be forever. God has turned the page on culture after culture just like we'd flip the pages of a book! It's still challenging to trust in the moment, but God sees beyond our immediate context. He sees from our beginning to end which is just a speck on His eternal spectrum. We should take comfort that God has been holding the world together since the day He separated light and darkness. Anything from that moment to eternity future that has anything to do with our created world, down to our very lives, is under the sovereign control of God!

- b. Habakkuk answers his own question with two characteristics of God that should serve as piles (as in construction piles). There will be more, but the first two characteristics are the holiness of God and the eternity of God:

Habakkuk 1:12b [Slide]: My Holy One, you will not die.

- (1) Holy comes from the word “qadowsh” which means set apart or sacred. God is not like us even though we often deal with God like He’s a person. He’s not. We have the image of God on us and we have a brother in the God-Man Jesus Christ, but God is other. I think we sometimes forget that God is totally free from the qualities we possess as fallen human beings. Everything we do is marred by sin; not so with God! God is perfect in every way, even in those we don’t understand. He is without blemish.

- (2) He has been forever and will be!

Habakkuk 1:12c [Slide]: LORD, you appointed them to execute judgement;

- c. We don’t have to put on a smiley face or fake it when it comes to accepting God’s justice, but we cannot question the character of God in the process! Habakkuk hated the reality that the Babylonians were being appointed by God to execute His judgement. We look at scenarios in our own lives and we don’t like how justice is being administered or we question God’s decisions. Habakkuk did that so we have scriptural precedent, but what we must ensure is that our pilings are anchored firm. God is perfect in all His ways, and He is eternal! His perspective is unlike ours!

Habakkuk 1:12d [Slide]: my Rock, you destined them to punish us.

- d. Another piling that Habakkuk clings to is the immutable nature of God. God does not change or fluctuate. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. In other words, the Babylonians think they’re in control, but Habakkuk knows that can’t be so. If God is our Rock, He cannot be moved. That means the Babylonians were commissioned by God to execute justice over Judah. This is all happening under the sovereign hand of God. From Habakkuk’s perspective this is all unfathomable, but he drives another piling down. God is his:

[Slide]: Rock

- (1) When we don’t understand the methods that God uses to execute justice, we must maintain our belief that God is our immutable, unchangeable, immovable, Rock. God isn’t tossed around by the changing tides of a culture. He’s not sitting on the edge of heaven waiting to see how events unfold! God is good and He is calling the shots even when we don’t understand His activity!

Habakkuk 1:13 [Slide]: Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why do you tolerate those who are treacherous? Why are you silent while one who is wicked swallows up one who is more righteous than himself?

- e. The last piling we’ll consider is the fact:

[Slide]: God cannot tolerate wrongdoing.

- (1) We could substitute the word “evil” or “injustice.” If someone is acting unjustly, God will hold them accountable! It may not happen today or tomorrow, but God does call injustice to account. Nothing is hidden from His eyes! If it looks like someone is getting away with something, maybe they are for now. But remember, eternity is a long time. And everyone is going to have a little sit down with Jesus at some point and give an account of their life. We’ll be judged off our works or the work of Christ.

5. When it comes to the justice of God, and the methods God uses to execute His judgement, many times we find ourselves confused or frustrated. Habakkuk is still in this place even after God has responded to him. Verses 14-17 is Habakkuk’s plea to God yet again that God’s plan is flawed! Habakkuk knows the character of God. He doesn’t doubt that aspect of his relationship with God, but he can’t understand how God could use such an unconventional plan to execute His justice.

- a. After Habakkuk has vented to God about His frustrations, he declares this:

Habakkuk 2:1 [Slide]: 1 I will stand at my guard post and station myself on the look out tower. I will watch to see what he will say to me and what I should reply about my complaint.

b. Habakkuk isn't in a good mood. He doesn't want to be comforted by a bible verse right now. Maybe you've been there, and someone starts quoting scripture and you really don't want to hear it. Sometimes we need to just mourn with those who mourn.

c. Habakkuk goes out to the highest point of the city which for us would be like the top floor of a high rise downtown. He looks out over Jerusalem to get the most advanced perspective he can humanly get. Now imagine you had the opportunity to go and have a conversation with Habakkuk in that very moment. Imagine having the conversation with the information we have now.

6. Habakkuk, my heart grieves for what you and all of Judah will soon endure. I desire to tell you differently, but things will get much worse before they improve. The temple will soon be destroyed, and the future King Zedekiah will be hauled off to Babylon in chains. Most of the ruling class will be deported too, but God will preserve a remnant and raise up the young man Daniel to establish God's rule over Babylon. The Persians will rise by the hand of God and execute God's justice on the Babylonians. The people of Judah will eventually return to the land, but God will prove His plan never wavered. God fearing Magi from the East will even be some of the first people to worship the long awaited Messiah. Don't lose heart Habakkuk! God is faithful!

D. Knowing what we do, that would probably be the conversation we'd have with Habakkuk if we could. So, knowing that God is still holy and eternal. He's still our Rock. He's still the God that cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Imagine that we are on the top floor of a sky rise downtown and we're looking out to get as advanced perspective as we can. Imagine someone 50, 100, 1000 years down the road being able to join us and all the things they might say as to how God will unfold His perfect plan of justice and righteousness. I bet all we could do is be:

[Slide]: Utterly astounded!

1. God is probably not going to do that for us and that's not what He's going to do for Habakkuk either. But what God is going to do for Habakkuk is give him enough perspective on what's to come in order to extend and invite him to:

[Slide]: Trust Him!

2. We don't know what the future holds and how God will choose to execute His justice. Some of us are really wrestling with the question we mentioned earlier:

[Slide]: Can I count on God to be just with me?

3. Some of us may have been victim to a terrible thing. Some of us may have inflicted injustice on another and we can't forgive the oppression we've caused. God is holy. God is just. God is love. He fully demonstrated all 3 on the cross where Jesus died for both the justice due and the injustice caused. All of us had a debt that was unpayable. Jesus paid that debt.

4. We still don't know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future.

The holy, eternal, Rock that extends the same invitation to us today as He did to Habakkuk thousands of years ago:

[Slide]: Do you trust Me?