

**Habakkuk:
Making Sense of Today's News**

Waiting for God's Answer

Habakkuk 2:1-3

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Waiting for God's Answer¹

Scripture

Let's continue with the third message in our series titled, "Making Sense of Today's News." Let us read Habakkuk 2:1-3:

**¹ I will stand at my watch
and station myself on the ramparts;
I will look to see what he will say to me,
and what answer I am to give to this complaint.**

² Then the Lord replied:

**"Write down the revelation
and make it plain on tablets
so that a herald may run with it.**

**³ 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.**

(Habakkuk 2:1-3)

Introduction

It was everyone's nightmare. At 15,000 feet Edmund Gravely died at the controls of his small plane. He and his wife were on their way to Statesboro, Georgia, from the Rocky Mount-Wilson Airport in North Carolina. His wife, Janice, did not know how to fly. But she managed to keep the plane in the air for two hours.

During that time period she continually radioed for help. Several Air Traffic Controllers heard her screaming, "Help! Help! Won't someone help me? My husband and pilot is unconscious."

¹ Much of the material for this message comes from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Faith Tried & Triumphant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987).

But there was a serious problem keeping her from getting help, a problem she didn't even realize. Although the authorities could hear her distress calls, they weren't able to reach her by radio. Why? Because she kept changing the channels. She wouldn't wait long enough at any channel for a response from a Controller.

Amazingly, Janice Gravely survived the crash, although she had to crawl for forty-five minutes to a farmhouse to find help.

Waiting is one of the hardest things to do in life. Especially during a time of crisis. No one likes to wait. The word "wait" has got to be the Christian's four letter word. Wouldn't you rather do anything than wait? In fact, some would rather do the wrong thing than wait.

Most of you have heard the American Prayer: "Lord, give me patience—and I want it right now!" It's hard for people who live on frozen dinners, instant breakfasts, and microwave cakes to wait!

The famous New England preacher of a previous century, Phillips Brooks, was known for not handling waiting too well. One day a friend saw him pacing the floor like a caged lion and asked him, "Dr. Brooks, what is the trouble?" Brooks responded, "The trouble is that I am in a hurry, but God is not!"

Waiting seems to me to be the rule rather than the exception in life. The exception is an open door; when you have one—go! But the truth is that just doesn't happen very often! The bursts of green lights seem to happen for just a few short moments in life. The rest of the time is filled with yellow lights, and mostly red lights that continually flash, "Wait! Wait! Wait!"

Habakkuk knew, like few others, what it meant to wait on God. Like all of us, during the tough times in life, he was very tempted to switch the channels. But he resisted that temptation, and in doing so set before us a model worthy of our study.

Review

As you may recall in our first study of this book, Habakkuk was very disturbed. The people of Judah had wandered away from

the Lord. Wickedness and gross immorality marked their lives. Habakkuk's heart was broken over it. And so he prayed fervently for God to bring change. But nothing happened! The heavens were silent! In our first message we saw that God's ways are often mysterious and also that God's ways are often misunderstood.

In our second lesson we saw that God finally broke that silence—but when he did, what he told Habakkuk actually made matters worse for the prophet. God said that he was going to send the wicked Babylonians to judge the people of Judah. Such a response from God just didn't make sense to the prophet. Why would God use a nation far more wicked than Judah to correct his people? And so Habakkuk wrestled with his problem.

Last week I gave you a procedure for dealing with problems. I said that there are four steps in dealing with problems. When dealing with problems, we must **pray**: (1) **pause** to think, (2) **restate** basic principles, (3) **apply** the principles to the problem, and (4) **yield** the problem to God in faith, if still in doubt.

Habakkuk had applied the first three steps to his problem but he was still stuck. So, as I promised you last week, today I am developing step (4): if still in doubt about what God is doing, if still in doubt about how to proceed with a particular problem, **yield** the problem to God in faith. Today, let us see how Habakkuk did that.

Lesson

After telling God about his problem in chapter 1 Habakkuk went on to say in Habakkuk 2:1: **“I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.”**

The important thing is that Habakkuk now realized that the one thing to do was to wait on God. It was not enough just to pause to think, to restate basic principles, and to apply the principles to the problem. Habakkuk was still in doubt, and so he yielded the problem to God in faith. He was waiting for God's answer.

But what does this mean in practice? Let me suggest the following steps to help you wait for God's answer.

I. Commit Your Problem to God (1:1)

First, commit your problem to God.

You must detach yourself from your problem. Habakkuk's words suggest that interpretation by picturing a tower set upon a high elevation that commanded a wide view and a grand panorama, such as is used by military observers in order to anticipate the arrival of an enemy. The watchman is far above the plains and crowds of people, occupying a vantage point where he can see everything that is happening. Habakkuk said in verse 1: **"I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint."**

Now here is one of the most important principles in the psychology of the Christian life, or the understanding of how to fight in your spiritual conflict.

Once you have committed the problem to God, you should stop concerning yourself with it. You should turn your back on it and center your gaze upon God.

Is this not exactly where you go astray? You have a problem and you are still perplexed about it. You have applied the procedures of pausing to think, restating basic principles and placing the problem in the context of those principles. But you still do not find satisfaction. And you don't know what to do. The problem may be anything. It could be the problem of making sense of today's news. It could be the problem of what to do with your life. It could be the problem of a child that is going astray. It could be the problem of a spouse that is leaving you. Having failed to reach a solution, despite following the procedure mentioned and depending upon the Holy Spirit for guidance, there is nothing more to do but to commit the problem to God in faith.

But what frequently happens is this. You go on our knees and tell God about the thing that is worrying you. You tell him that you cannot solve the difficulty yourself. You tell him that you do not understand the solution. And so you ask him to deal with it and to show you his way. Then the moment you get up from our knees you begin to worry about the problem again. Isn't this what happens in your life?

Now if you do that, you might just as well not have prayed.

If you take your problem to God, leave it with God. You have no right to brood over it any longer.

In his perplexity, Habakkuk said in effect, "I am going to get out of this valley of depression. I am going to the watchtower. I am going up to the heights. I am going to look to God—to God alone." This is one of the most important secrets of the Christian life!

If you have committed your problem to God and go on thinking about it, perhaps your prayers were not genuine. If you told God that you had reached an impasse, and that you could not solve your problem, and that you were handing it over to him, then leave it with him. Leave it with God, and go on to the watchtower.

This may not be easy to do. You may have to be very forceful with yourself to do this. Nevertheless, it is essential. You must never allow yourself to become submerged by a difficulty, to be shut in by the problem. You must come right out of it and say, like Habakkuk, "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts." You have to disentangle yourself deliberately, to haul yourself out of it, as it were, to detach yourself from it altogether, and then take your stand looking to God—not at the problem.

There are numerous illustrations of this important principle in the Scriptures as well as in Christian biography. Looking to God means depending entirely upon God, and "waiting" only upon him.

About the time I graduated from the University of Cape Town, the company for which I worked wanted to transfer me to another city, a city in which I really did not want to live. I was distraught but I looked to God for guidance and comfort. As I recall, I spent several nights reading and praying for hours on end. Finally,

after many days, the fog and depression just lifted as it seemed that God was comforting and encouraging me by his Word and Spirit. Although my circumstances had not changed, my attitude had. And I knew that I could trust God no matter where he led me.

Habakkuk looked at his problem but he could see no light. He was confronted by the fact that God was going to take those appalling Babylonians, people altogether worse than his own nation, and was going to use them for his own purpose. He could not understand it, nor reconcile it with the holiness of God. But he could and did take it to God. Having done so, he looked to God and ceased to look at his difficulty. That is the true basis of spiritual peace.

That is exactly what Paul meant in Philippians 4:6-7: “Do not be anxious about anything.” It does not matter what the problem is. Never let yourself be anxious, and never let yourself be burdened or worn down by care. You have no right to be perturbed. You must never have that anxious care that is not only spiritually crippling but also physically debilitating. Never be anxious but “in everything”—that is all-inclusive—“by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” And then, “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

So, get up into your watchtower and just keep looking to God. Look at nothing else, least of all your problem.

II. Expect an Answer from God (1:1b)

Second, expect an answer from God.

Habakkuk said, “**I will look to see what he will say to me**” (1:1b). The military watchman’s task was to keep his eye on that landscape in front for the slightest indication of movement on the part of the enemy. Habakkuk was looking for the answer.

You and I so often fail because we just pray to God and then forget about it. If you pray, you must expect answers to your prayers. Do you in fact, after you have prayed, continue looking to

God and eagerly await his answer? Are you like Habakkuk in his watchtower, expecting the answer to come at any moment?

God, of course, may answer in a number of different ways. For instance, you can expect God to answer you as you read his Word. This is the most common way of all. As you are reading the Scriptures, suddenly a new and wonderful light is cast upon your problem. If you say to yourself, "This is the Word of God through which he speaks to me and I wonder what he has to say to me," then you are likely to obtain your answer. Watch and wait for it.

Then God sometimes answers by what the old divines used to call "intimations." That is, God seems to answer through internal impressions concerning the way you should go.

Then again God sometimes answers your prayers by so providentially ordering your circumstances, and the day-to-day happenings of your life, that it becomes quite plain what God is saying. God never calls you to do any work without opening the door. He may take a long time, but if God wants you to do some special task he will shut other doors and open one particular door. Your whole life will be directed to that end. This is a common experience in the Christian life. God often allows obstacles to arise, but the way ahead remains clear. God's will is certain.

The point is that you must be looking for these answers, and be ready to recognize them when they come.

Having committed your problem to God, you must expect God to answer. You should also compare one indication of guidance with another, because if God is always consistent with himself in his dealings with you, as he always is, you can expect all of them to converge and agree with one another.

III. Be Persistent in Your Expectation (1:1b)

Third, be persistent in your expectation.

You must watch eagerly and persistently, like Habakkuk in his tower. Habakkuk implied that in his image. He said that he was going to stay in his watchtower until God answered his question:

“I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.”

God likes that kind of persistence. It is that kind of persevering attitude that God honors. You must believe that God is always true to his Word, and that his promises never fail.

Having committed yourself and your problem to God, you must persist in looking with an eagerness, which knows that God is certain to answer. It is dishonoring to God not to do so.

If you believe that God is your Father, and that the very hairs of your head are all numbered, and that God is much more concerned about your welfare and well-being than you are yourself, and if you believe that God is much more concerned about the honor of his great and glorious name than you are, then it is surely dishonoring to God not to look for an answer after you have prayed to him. It is indicative of a serious lack of faith. Nothing so shows the character of your faith as your conduct and attitude after you have prayed. The men of faith not only prayed, but they expected answer, and they persevered in their expectation of an answer.

Sometimes, in a panic, you pray to God. Then, after the panic is over, you forget all about it. The test of your faith is whether you expect an answer, and then persevere in that expectation.

This is what I fear is happening in America these days. After the September 11 attack on America, churches all over the country were filled with people praying, but now that things seemed to have calmed down, many people are ignoring God again.

The prophet stood at his watch, and set himself in his tower. Though he could not understand God's actions, he committed the problem to God, expected an answer from God, and then persevered in his expectation for that answer.

IV. God Rewards Faith (2:2-3)

Finally, God rewards faith.

God rewarded Habakkuk's faith. Habakkuk 2:2-3 contain the answer Habakkuk was given: **“Then the LORD replied: ‘Write**

down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. 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.”

This lesson is invaluable. It is an absolute law in the spiritual realm that if we adopt Habakkuk's method, and behave as he behaved, God will always honor his promises.

In effect, God said, “It is all right, Habakkuk, I have heard your prayer. I understand your bewilderment. Here is my answer. The Babylonians I am raising up to punish Judah will themselves in turn be completely routed and destroyed.”

The greatness of the Babylonians was going to be short-lived. It was God who for a special purpose raised them up. But they took the glory to themselves and became inflated with a sense of their own power. Then God struck, and later raised up the Medes and the Persians who utterly destroyed the Babylonians. God told the prophet to write the prophecy very clearly, so that anyone reading it could at once understand and run to obey and warn others.

Conclusion

Waiting on God is hard. But it is imperative if we are going to grow in our Christian lives. Habakkuk gives us a tremendous example of how to wait for God's answers to our problems.

I know that some of you are struggling today. You are wondering why the terrorists attack and wars occur. You are wondering what will happen. You are wondering about problems in your own life. Let me leave you with two lasting lessons that come to my mind from this text.

First, know that things are not always as they seem. What may now seem to be totally absurd to you will one day make sense. The lesson of Habakkuk is that sometimes you just won't be able to make sense out of your circumstances—at least not now. And until that day, you must learn what it means to trust in God and his promise that it all really does fit in his plan. And if God is waiting

longer than you want, know that it is only for your good. Know that your time is in his hands, and he has promised never to delay his answer one moment too long.

And second, waiting for God's answers strengthens your patience and lengthens your perspective. The short view of life is usually the false view. First impressions are often wrong impressions. Initial impressions of God's working are usually incorrect ones. That's why in waiting you will have your patience strengthened and perspective lengthened.

Sweeping across Germany at the end of World War II, Allied Forces searched farms and houses looking for snipers. At one abandoned house, amongst a heap of rubble, searchers with flashlights, found their way to the basement. There, on the crumbling wall, a victim of the holocaust had scratched a Star of David. And beneath it, in rough lettering, they found the following message:

I believe in the sun—even when it does not shine;
I believe in love—even when it is not shown;
I believe in God—even when he does not speak.

Happily, God does speak. But he does not always speak immediately. Sometimes he waits to answer problems. God wants you to wait on him for his answers. Learn to wait. Don't switch the channels. Do what Habakkuk did while waiting for God's answer:

1. Commit your problem to God,
2. Expect an answer from God,
3. Be persistent in your expectation, and, remember that
4. God rewards faith.

May God help each one of us learn this approach as we wait for God's answer. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

Our Father in heaven, waiting is one of the hardest things to do in life. Life seems to be filled with yellow and red lights rather than green lights. Teach us how to wait for your answers to the problems and difficulties we encounter in life.

Bring today's lesson to mind when we encounter problems, whether national or personal. Remind us that when waiting for your answer, we should commit the problem to you, expect an answer from you, be persistent in our expectation, and remember that you reward faith.

And as we do so, may you receive all the glory as we learn to wait for your answers.

All of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

May the God who controls today's news help each one of you to trust him fully. And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.