

May 25, 2008

“Trusting God”
Habakkuk 2:2-20

FCF: Compelled but confused by stories of faith

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because God is God,
(magnet) we must trust Him in all things – including in the hardest of times.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

China is much in the news these days. Wanting to garner the world’s attention, officials have done much in preparation for the Olympics. But, of course, much of that attention has been shifted now to the earthquake – both the destruction and the recovery.

But there was a time when China was hardly on anyone’s radar. That is, until a gaunt and wild-eyed 21-year-old missionary named Hudson Taylor sailed there in 1853 from Liverpool. Taylor was bold and intense in his approach (**READ quote**):

China is not to be won for Christ by quiet, ease-loving men and women...The stamp of men and women we need is such as will put Jesus, China, (and) souls first and foremost in everything and at every time – even life itself must be secondary.

Taylor was bold in other ways as well. There were to be no salaries, no fund raising. Those who signed on were to press into the China interior and trust God for their needs.

A radical dependence upon God in all things. Is such faith possible today?

SCRIPTURE READING: **Habakkuk 2:2-20**

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Reading a novel is often an exercise in faith. The opening chapters can be so very confusing. New characters are introduced. Disparate, seemingly random events take place. Complicated subplots are woven in that don’t seem to make any sense with little to no bearing on the main plot. But you have to keep reading. Why? Well, with a trusted author, you know it will be woven together in the end. Eventually, each element will prove meaningful. But in the beginning, pressing on can be an exercise in faith.

Last week we considered Habakkuk 1 and the topic of arguing with God. Flowing from that arguing, we now learn something in Habakkuk 2 of what it is to listen to and trust Him as well. Habakkuk is writing during a painful period in Judah’s history. Things were not the way they were supposed to be. And so, as we saw last time, he listed the things he knew and the things he didn’t. And, after listing it out, he laid it before the LORD and waited. Then, in the LORD’s answer, Habakkuk learned something of what it is to not only to wait but to live by faith. In fact, the answer was so vital, he was to announce it, to herald this news that others would hear as well (**READ Habakkuk 2:2-3**).

Habakkuk is given a vision, a vision he is to write down and pass on. It’s a vision showing the LORD was fully in control and fully aware of what He was doing – even if Habakkuk was not. It’s a vision of contrasts (**READ Habakkuk 2:4-5**). On the one hand, you have those who are “puffed up” – swollen and proud. They are “not upright” – not straight, turned and twisted within. On the other hand, you have the “righteous” – those right with God. As some versions put it, the “just” – those whose hearts beat in cadence with His own. There are these two groups in this vision and a series of contrasts between the two. And, if not explicit, at least implicit in it all is a call to walk by faith, to trust the LORD – to know He is God and to trust Him in all things, even in the hardest of times.

I. A DEEP TRUST

To walk by faith with a deep trust in the LORD. The idea being that life and deliverance from destruction is promised to the faithful, those holding fast to the Word of

promise, confidently awaiting its fulfillment even in, especially through, trials and trouble. All of which, of course, is contrasted with the pride, the arrogance, the boasting of the Chaldeans, the Babylonians raised up by the LORD for His purposes.

Now there is some ambiguity here in v.4. Is it the righteous shall live by “faith” or by “faithfulness?” Which one is it? Good question. It’s both. I’ll explain in a minute.

A) Looking Not to Self

The obvious thing here is it is not a looking to self, such as with the Chaldeans.

1. Living for themselves

Consider their actions, how they’re described as but living for themselves.

2. Depending on themselves

And, even more, in their attitudes, there is a crass depending on themselves as well.

B) But to God

What it means to walk by faith with a deep trust in the LORD is set forward here in a clear contrast between looking to self and looking to God (**READ Habakkuk 2:4**).

1. Living for God

Living for God. The righteous and just is upright – living according to his faith, living it out. He is not arrogant, restless, greedy, insatiable. He is satisfied in and by God.

2. Depending on God

He is living for God. And depending upon Him as well. He is not “puffed up.” He is living out his faith and by his faith as well. His is a firm attachment to the LORD, a confidence in His promises that holds and bears fruit even through trials and troubles.

Back to the ambiguity – does the righteous live by “faith” or “faithfulness?” Again, it’s both. It’s a confidence and faith rooted in the faithfulness of God. It’s also a faithfulness in that faithful God expressing itself outwardly. And through this, one will be delivered.

Illustration:

Last week, in considering what it is to argue with God, we talked about two parties – one with the ability to act, the other with the security to ask. Again here we have two parties – one in position to help and the other needing to rely upon them. It’s the trust we put in another to guide us to places and teach us in things we don’t know.

Application:

Okay, what do we do with this? How do we transfer this over to today? Think with me. You can’t know why a hope has been dashed, your body seems to be broken, this relationship is fractured, or why your life is such a mess. It may be because of your sin. It may be because of someone else’s. It may be because we live in a fallen world. It may be God is trying to teach you something. It may be some combination of all those. But you can’t really know for sure. What you can know is that God’s purposes “will surely come” even if for now “they seem slow.” And those purposes are good. And so we take each day as it comes and trust Him for what will come. And be faithful now.

God is God and so we must trust Him in all things – even in the hardest of times.

II. A CONTINUAL TRUST

It is a deep trust. And continual as well. Here too we see a contrast between the Chaldeans, this independent mindset, and the follower of God. Look at the introduction and summary of the woes (**READ Habakkuk 2:5**). Their intoxication with and for themselves was continual. And, in contrast, so too is living by faith – a continual trust.

A) Not Occasional

It is not to be occasional – not then and not now.

1. Not when we happen to remember

The living for and depending upon the LORD is not to be when we happen to remember.

2. Not when we find ourselves in a crisis

Nor is it to be just when we find ourselves in a jam, in a crisis.

B) But Ongoing

Far more than occasional, this living by faith is to be ongoing.

1. Daily and continual

Daily and continual – in the everyday and the uneventful.

2. Overflowing into the extraordinary and stressful

In the ordinary and stressfree and then overflowing into the extraordinary and stressful.

Application:

(**READ Habakkuk 2:4**) Not just a deep trust but a continual trust – a need to be faithful, trusting, humbly dependent in all things, even in small things. And then from the small things, out of the outgrowth of who and what we are, into the larger things.

Illustration:

On this point, we have something to learn from the prayers we teach our children. One you may know goes like this, “*Our hands we fold, our heads we bow. For food and drink, we thank Thee now. We love you, Jesus. Amen.*” Now that might seem like a small thing, but rightly explained and modeled, it can communicate something quite profound – our ongoing dependence not just for life in general but for the very means our lives are sustained. Recognizing, of course, that this is not the way of the puffed up Chaldean. But it is the way of the righteous, the one who is living by faith in the LORD.

III. A LASTING TRUST

Which brings us to the last point, the last contrast. Walking, living by faith entails a deep trust, a continual trust, and a lasting trust as well. That is, it begins in this life and then flows over with eternal repercussions into the next. (**READ Habakkuk 2:4**) Note the contrast between those who trust in themselves and those who trust in the LORD.

A) Sobering Fate

We see this in vv.6-20. Taunting, ridiculing, scorning – theirs is a sobering fate.

1. Five woes

Five woes listed here – something along the lines of a mock funeral dirge.

2. Summary

In a sense, the Chaldeans were to get theirs. Nations would rise up against them. Their evil would come back on itself, carrying within itself the seeds of its own destruction.

But here’s the thing. The LORD is speaking here to more than just events as they would unfold with the empires of the ancient Near East. Those real and historical events served as something of a foretaste of a greater turnaround and judgment coming in the future.

B) Sweeping Changes

I say that because of the sweeping changes alluded to in the midst of these woes.

1. Survival

Yes, v.4 speaks of the preservation of God’s people as they look to Him in those days.

2. Renewal

But in v.14, we see something even greater (**READ Habakkuk 2:12-14**). More than even the glory of the LORD, this speaks of the knowledge of that glory bathing the whole of creation. A glorious renewal is coming. Intimate experiential relationship is spoken of – a sweeping renewal. We don’t know how or when it is coming but it is coming.

Application:

And the anticipation of that was to bolster and buoy the faith of Habakkuk and his contemporaries all the more. Hope for the future transforming life in the present. Abiding trust, faith in the LORD frees us. Now that may seem counter-intuitive. Some say, “Doesn’t such faith shackle you? Doesn’t belief in an almighty deity keep you from moving forward, hem you in – too afraid to make a mistake?” Yes, with a god that keeps score. But not with the God of all grace. With Him we have nothing to fear. We know His power and love are greater than any mistake we could ever make. So we are free.

Illustration:

Let me give you an example of this. With one leap, the African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in a zoo with but a 3-foot wall. How? They won’t jump if they can’t see where their feet will fall. They won’t jump if they can’t see where their feet will fall. Faith in the true and living God brings the freedom to jump, to run, to really and finally be free. Because we know our feet will fall well.

CONCLUSION:

Such was Habakkuk’s vision. Because God is God, His people are free to trust Him in all things, even in the hardest of times. It is a life of faith. But the question begs to be asked, “*How does such a life begin?*” It’s worth pointing out here that Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three times in the New Testament, the authors appealing back to this text to illustrate their point. We are not only to live by faith. We are saved through faith – by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. That’s how this life of faith begins. Looking to and relying upon the finished work of Christ to save us from sin’s penalty, sin’s power, and, one day, even its presence. Such is the gospel right here in seed form.

A life of faith, trusting God. It’s a message that was revealed slowly but surely with increasing clarity as the centuries went by. And a message that is consistently found in every page of the Scriptures. What is impossible with man is possible with God – the salvation of sinners. On the one hand, so very large – the door opened wide, as big as you can imagine, peoples from every race, culture, and background. On the other hand, so very small – this great circle including only those who believe (**READ Habakkuk 2:4**).

And we have to say this again and again – to one another and the watching world – for our instincts are so very wrong on this point. We need Christ. We need faith in Christ. We can be so self-dependent. And so self-deceived. Charles Spurgeon used to tell the story of a boat upset above Niagara Falls (**READ Spurgeon quote, p.61-62**):

Two men were being carried down the current when persons on the shore managed to throw a rope to them. Both seized it. One of them held on to it and was safely drawn to the bank. But the other, seeing a great log floating by, unwisely let go of the rope and clung to the log, for it was bigger and apparently better to cling to. The log with the man on it went right over the vast abyss, because there was no union between the log and the shore. The size of the log was of no benefit to the man who grasped it; it needed a connection with the shore to produce safety. So when a man trusts to his works or to sacraments or to anything of that sort, he will not be saved, because there is no junction between him and Christ. But faith, though it may seem to be like a slender cord, is in the hands of the great God on the shore side; infinite power pulls in the connecting line and thus draws the man from destruction. Oh, the blessedness of faith because it unites us to God!

Great story. Which leaves us with but one question. On what are you laying hold? We have but two choices – a log floating by or the line that will save (**READ Habakkuk 2:4**).

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