

6.8.23 pm

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Date: 06 August 2023

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening. A warm welcome to the service this evening and especially welcome to those who are visiting with us who are not normally here. It's good to have a few visitors with us tonight. We're going to begin this time of worship and we're going to sing from Psalm 13.

Psalm 13, not one we often sing, but it's a psalm that kind of gels with the verses that we read in Habakkuk chapter 1. Psalm 13, it shows how honestly we can come to God in prayer. And the psalmist says, How long wilt thou forget me, Lord? Shall it forever be? O how long shall it be that thou will hide thy face from me? How long take counsel in my soul? Still sad in heart shall I. How long exalted over me shall be mine enemy? O Lord my God, consider well and answer to me, make mine eyes in light unless the sleep of death may overtake. So we'll sing these verses. We sing in Gaelic the first three stanzas of Psalm 13. We'll remain seated to sing and after that Angus Alec will lead us in prayer. And Gaelic, please.

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SONG PLAYS SONG PLAYS SONG PLAYS A holy ghost our hearts inspire, let us thy
influence prove.

O'er so the old prophetic twilight, founded of life and love?

A holy ghost our good by thee, the prophet's road has flown.

Unlock the truth, thyself the key, unseal the sacred good.

[21 : 55] It's man like wings, celestial dove, through the Lord our nature's night.

On our dishonor's spirit is blue, and let there now be light.

God through himself we then shall know, with love within us shine.

And sound with all thy saints below, the depths of love divine.

Let's pray as we come back to God's word.

[23 : 04] Heavenly Father, as we have sung, we would echo the words of the hymn writer and pray that you would help us, that you would inspire us.

Lord God, we thank you for the work of the Holy Spirit who inspired the prophets to write the words that we have read tonight. And we thank you that the same Holy Spirit is the one who works in this place and in our hearts as we have your word open before us.

And we ask, Holy Spirit, that you would be our teacher, that you would unlock the book, that you would enable us to see and hear and hear and feel tonight.

We pray that you would minister to us, Lord God, in such a way as to change us, that those who are still lost would be saved. And that those of us who are saved, that we would be sanctified, that we would be made more like Jesus.

We ask, Lord, that you would be with each one who's here tonight, that you would bless us, Lord, that you would work in our hearts. You know our hearts, you know our homes, you know our situations.

[24 : 26] And we thank you that as we cry out to you and ask for your help, that you hear us and you do help us spiritually and physically in every way.

We thank you that we can call out to you in prayer, knowing that you are the God who is able to supply all our needs and to help us. We pray for those who are not here tonight, but who are still in worship, wherever they may be.

We think of those who watch at home and we ask, Lord, that you would minister to them, those who would desire to be present, but have no opportunity to be here, who are struggling with age and infirmity and illness.

We ask, Lord, that you would minister to them, that they would receive a blessing as they open your word, as we do here just now. We pray for the congregations that we're connected with.

We thank you for those who are visiting with us tonight and we ask that you would bless them and the places that they come from. We thank you for every place here in Harris and across the nation and across all nations where Christ crucified is preached.

[25 : 38] We ask, Lord, that you would add your blessing, that you would build your church. And we thank you that there is just one church, the church of Jesus Christ. And although denominations and nations rise and fall, although the scene of time changes, we thank you that we have the promise that the church of Christ will never die.

The gates of hell will not prevail against it. So, Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are still building your church. And we ask, Lord, that you would build your church here in this nation and every nation that's connected with us.

We pray for Adam, who's just outside there, the church building from Poland, listening in from a distance. We ask that you would minister to him also and bless Poland, the country that he is from.

We thank you that although we may not know each other and know each other's situations, you know us. And we ask that you would bless us and minister to us this evening. Hear our prayers, take away our sin, equip us for all that you call us to do.

And we ask this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. A few boys and girls here tonight. So I thought I would start by asking you a question.

[27 : 00] What can you tell me about Habakkuk? If I was to ask you about Daniel, can you tell me anything about Daniel? Yeah?

Where are they all? Where's all the quiet ones in the front row? You could tell me about Daniel. What comes into your mind? Just give me a few words from Daniel's life. Lion's den, said the big child in the front there.

Not too low a hairline. Or we could think about John. We could think about Peter. We could think about Adam. We could think about Moses. There's probably quite a few things that we could say about the lives of all these people.

Gideon. You could tell me about Gideon, couldn't you? But what could you tell me about Habakkuk? Well, let's phrase the age. What about people in their 20s?

Let's hear some information about Habakkuk. 30s? 40s? See, there's not too much about Habakkuk that we can actually know.

[28 : 10] You know, there are some people who come into the spotlight and there are some people who kind of stay under the radar. We see that in the secular world. You know, we see people who all of a sudden come into the spotlight.

Maybe they win some sporting contest or they star in a film that goes through the box office with great success or they get a viral video on some platform and all we hear is this name and they love it.

They just milk their 15 minutes of fame for all that they can possibly get. But there are other people who stay sort of low-key and mysterious. And although we might see their name, we don't get to know them.

Habakkuk's kind of like that. If you search in the Bible for his name, you'll only hear his name used twice. In Habakkuk chapter 1, verse 1, it tells us that Habakkuk receives a prophecy.

And in Habakkuk chapter 3, verse 1, it tells us that Habakkuk prays. But you won't find his name anywhere else in the Bible. So we know very little about him.

[29 : 23] We know that his name means to wrestle, as in fight, or to embrace. It's a kind of strange double name.

It can mean to either wrestle or to embrace. And in this chapter, and in the course of the book, we see Habakkuk doing both things.

He's true to his name. He wrestles. He wrestles with God in prayer. And he embraces the Lord. He embraces God, the character of God, and the promises of God.

And that's really what we'll think about as we take a few minutes to go through this chapter tonight. The first thing we see, the first point is we see Habakkuk wrestling with God in prayer.

And we'll just step through the verses. Verse 1 says, It's the oracle that Habakkuk, the prophet, received. We might ask the question, what actually is an oracle?

[30 : 30] Because it's not a word that we use very often. If you've got the King James Version, I think, I should have checked this before I came out, but I think it uses the word burden. Is that right?

And so it can be translated both ways, the word. And an oracle in this context means a heavy, important message.

It's a burden that God gives to his man, his prophet Habakkuk, to carry to the people. So when we read about the oracle, or the burden that Habakkuk received, we probably expect a vision, or some kind of narrative to follow.

You know, like Ezekiel had. Ezekiel, remember, was given all these pictures, as did Zechariah. He studied that in the past.

He's given all these strange, hard-to-interpret pictures, and he passes them on to the people. Or we might expect to hear Habakkuk then speak a direct word from God to the people, like Isaiah did.

[31 : 46] But in this little book, it's only three chapters long, the oracle, the burden that Habakkuk is given, is prayer.

He's given a prayer. He's given a burden, a weight, to pray for God's people, who were struggling.

And so he, in verses 2 through to verse 4, he prays, as God the Holy Spirit inspires him, he prays to God.

And he prays for the people. He prays into the context, the world that he was living in. So look at verses 2 to 4. He cries out, How long, O Lord, must I call for help?

But you do not listen. Or cry out to you violence, but you do not save. Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?

[32 : 50] Destruction and violence are before me. There is strife and conflict abounds. Therefore, the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem on the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

So Habakkuk, as God directs him, Habakkuk is wrestling with God in prayer.

And I wonder, have any of us ever prayed a prayer like this? Because when we read these verses, and when we listen in to this prayer, we're almost nervous about this, because it's so bold, and it's so honest, and it's so striking.

So what does Habakkuk see? Because although he is being inspired by the Holy Spirit, he's still conscious of the world that he's in. So he's not praying a prayer that he's disconnected from.

He's praying a prayer that God has given him, but that speaks into the world that he's living in. So what does Habakkuk see in the world, in the context that he's in? Well, he sees violence, verse 2.

[34 : 06] And he speaks to the Lord about it. And he sees, verse 3, injustice, and wrong, and destruction, and violence, and strife, and conflict.

He brings it out to the Lord, and he tells him about it. And he sees, verse 4, the wicked getting away with things, and the righteous suffering, because of the things that the wicked are getting away with.

And it's all so wrong, and it grieves him, and it frustrates him. And so he takes it all to the Lord in prayer. And this is not a one-off prayer that he prays in some moment and then never returns to.

This is a prayer that Habakkuk seems to have been praying for some time as God is directing him. And yet God seems not to be listening. Habakkuk has been praying for help.

And God is not saving them. And so Habakkuk cries out in verse 2, How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?

[35 : 21] Or cry out. The literal layer in the Hebrew is scream. How long must I call for help, but you don't listen?

How long must I scream out to you? The top of my voice, violence. But you don't save. And that's the prayer that Habakkuk is given.

This is the burden. This is the oracle that he receives. And he's wrestling with God in prayer. So what was actually happening in Habakkuk's world historically?

Well, if we go back to the time frame, we can learn that God's people were drifting away from God. That was the world that he was living in.

King Josiah, who had led the people in following the Lord in God's way, he had recently died. And now, Josiah's king, King Jehoiakim, was leading the people in the opposite direction.

[36 : 28] He was leading the people of God away from God. And as the people drifted from God, the nation went from bad to worse. And there was trouble on the streets.

There was violence. There was strife. There was conflict. There was trouble in the courts. They were corrupt. They were bent. They were twisted. There's no justice there. The law no longer brought any kind of relief, but it just brought further perversion.

So that was Habakkuk's world. That's what he lived in. And it distresses him. And God teaches him here to pray, to bring everything that he sees and feels and is grieved over back to God in prayer.

And, you know, we might read this thousands of years later, but this is our world too. We can take all the descriptive words that Habakkuk uses and we can see them in our newspapers any day of the week.

Violence, injustice, wrong, destruction, strife, conflict. It's the news broadcast every night of our lives. And just as the nation that Habakkuk was grieved over, we're drifting far from God.

[37 : 56] We are drifting from God. And just as the nation that Habakkuk is praying on behalf of are finding that the further they drift from God, the worse things they're getting, that's what we're experiencing.

Abortion is at an all-time high, I think I'm right in saying that, Anthony. Marriage is under attack, constantly. the family unit that's been systematically dismantled in front of our eyes.

Even things like the gender God gave us is under attack and constantly being questioned as we shake our fist at God.

And so that's our context as it was Habakkuk's context. So what do we do? Do we look to the laws of the land for some hope? Now, well, we don't do that because we can see that the laws of the land are actually being used to drag us further away from God.

So we're living in Habakkuk's world. So what do we do? Well, God through Habakkuk is teaching us to pray.

[39 : 16] God through Habakkuk is seeking to give us a burden to pray for our nation.

So here's a really practical thing. You know, every night as we watch the news, every day as we pick up the newspapers, or when we click onto a video and we see something that distresses us, rather than read it or see it and complain and rant and rave or shake our heads and dismay and walk in the opposite direction, I think we've been taught here to pray, to take everything that we see, all these stories, all these situations, and lay them out before God, to take our nation, to take our friends and our family members and our community and to lay it out before the Lord in prayer.

With reverence, we can use the words that Habakkuk uses. We can call out, we can cry out, we can scream out reverently to God in prayer. We are taught here by Habakkuk to wrestle with God in prayer.

Remember, this is God teaching us. Earlier this week in conversation, Angus Alec made a mark that kind of stayed with me as I was preparing at the end of the week, and he said prayer has to come down before it goes up.

Prayers have to come down to us before we can offer them back up to God, and that's what we're seeing here. God is giving Habakkuk a burden to pray, and he's lifting the nation, the situations, the people, back up to God in prayer.

[41 : 25] Are we doing that? It's easy to be despairing, it's easy to be in a state of depression, and go silent, it's easy to rant and rave and cry out to other people about the state of the nation.

But what we're being taught to do in this short book is to wrestle with God in prayer. We see Habakkuk wrestling with God in prayer.

So that's the first four verses. The second thing we see here is Habakkuk is taught by God to watch God at work.

Because as Habakkuk prays, God answers. And the answer comes in verses 5 to 11. And essentially what God says to Habakkuk is, watch this.

Watch, I will answer your prayer. But the answer was not what Habakkuk expected. Verses 5 and 6. God says, look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed.

[42 : 37] For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.

And for Habakkuk, this would have shaken him to the core. Now, we know a bit about the Babylonians. They were the nation that were in power in Daniel's day.

So we can think back to Daniel's context, how that nation wanted to brainwash him out of any faith in God. They banned prayer. They threw believers into lions' dens and fiery furnaces.

They worshipped false gods. Dale Ralph Davis makes a comment. He says, they were a nation that worshipped cats. That's how evil they were. Sorry for any cat lovers in here.

But they were not a nice, friendly people. They were not a God-fearing nation. They were a brutal, ruthless, evil, violent people.

[43 : 51] And God says, I'm going to use them. I've heard your prayer. I'm going to answer your prayer. And these people, they will be used.

They won't be conscious of that. God will not be responsible for the evil that they do, but they will be used as God oversees. God is never the cause of evil, but he is able to take the situations that the devil would design for evil and turn them around for good.

And there's mystery in that. that. But that's how God works. We sang about it and that's the truth. And so God says to Habakkuk, watch how I work.

And if we were unconvinced of how ugly a people group the Babylonians were, we're given an even clearer picture. of what they're like in verses 7 through to verse 11.

They're a feared and dreaded people, verse 7. They're a law to themselves. They promote their own honour. And there's a whole lot of animal images which are used to just give us an impression of how ruthless and how violent they were.

[45 : 16] And God says, watch how I'll use this situation. these people even to answer your prayer. I remember being in a prayer meeting in Aberdeen some years ago, I've told you this before, and Dominic Smart was the minister, he's now in glory, but he was the minister who was leading the prayer meeting.

in the open prayer time, there was someone who prayed for revival. And Dominic at the end of the prayer time, it finished with somebody praying for revival.

And Dominic at the end, he said, of the prayer, he said, Amen. It's good to hear someone praying for revival, but he says, remember, when we're praying for revival, we often don't know what we're praying for, because revival usually comes at a time when it's very difficult to be a Christian.

Revival doesn't usually come when Christians are popular and life is comfortable. Revival usually comes when things get tough. And Habakkuk was praying for revival.

But God is telling Habakkuk that the Babylonians of all people would be used to bring revival to God's people.

[46 : 46] The Babylonians in some measure were the answer to Habakkuk's prayer. This is how the sovereign God would be at work.

Wearspeed commentator says, God answered his servant and assured him that he was at work among the nations even though Habakkuk couldn't see it. God gave Habakkuk a revelation not an explanation for what we always need in times of doubt is a new view of God.

The Lord doesn't owe us any explanations but he does graciously reveal himself and his work to those who seek him. And as Habakkuk is seeking the Lord God shares with him something of the surprising methods that he will use to do his work and answer Habakkuk's prayer and turn his wayward people back to himself.

And this is a truth that we need to keep on relearning. God is sovereign. If we don't believe that, we don't hold on to that, we'll constantly be in a state of panic and anxiety.

We'll be stressing about everything. Running around trying to fix everything. We're not in control but God is in control.

[48 : 20] He is sovereign. He is always at work. And sometimes God is at work much more so in the storms than he is in the calm.

And if you want an example of that, you've had it for the last three weeks through Wilf, Jonah. Jonah could tell us of how God was at work in the midst of the storms or we could speak to the disciples and go to the gospels and see how the disciples in the storm in the Sea of Galilee learned more about the power and the love and the care of Jesus than they ever learned on dry land or on flat seas.

The sovereign God is always at work and often in the most surprising ways. So when we go through stormy waters as a nation as Habakkuk was entering in this phase, what should we do?

We should keep on trusting the Lord and believing that he is at work. Keep on seeking him in prayer. And when we go through stormy waters as individuals or as families or as a church, what should we do?

Keep trusting that the Lord is working. keep on seeking him in prayer. That's what we're being taught through this little book and this prophet.

[49 : 58] We sang the message actually and it's a good application of the point that we're being taught. Though the nations rage, kingdoms rise and fall, there is still one king reigning over all.

So I will not fear, for this truth remains that my God is the ancient of days. none above him, not the Babylonians, not anyone, none before him, all of time in his hands, whether in Habakkuk's day or in our day, for it's thrown it shall remain and ever stand, all the power, all the glory, I will trust in his name, for my God is the ancient of days.

So Habakkuk, he's wrestling with God in prayer, he watches God at work, and the third thing, the last thing he does here is he embraces the promises of God.

And we see that in verses 12 and following. He says, O Lord, are you not from everlasting? Some translations, I think, would translate that as, are you not from ancient days?

My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O Lord, you have appointed them, the Babylonians, to execute judgment. O Rock, you have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil.

[51 : 28] You cannot tolerate wrong. And so Habakkuk, as he prays, and as he listens to God's word back to him, he begins to think theologically, he begins to think through who God is and how that impacts the situation.

And as he does that, he goes from a state of being troubled and fearful to a state of being full of faith. He goes from doubts and fears to peace in some measure.

He looks to God, he reflects on the character of God, and he reflects on the works of God, and that's what brings a steadiness back into his mind and his heart and his demeanor.

He reflects on the fact that God is eternal, he's from everlasting, he's the God of ancient times, he remembers that God is the God who in ancient times rescued his people over and over again from all these different nations and all these different situations.

nations. And Habakkuk is able to say, because this is our God, the eternal everlasting God, we won't die, we're going to be okay.

[52 : 50] And so he's encouraged as he thinks about the character of God, and yet he remembers also that God is the holy God, he's the holy one, who, verse 13, is too pure to look on evil, who cannot tolerate wrong, who executes judgment, verse 12.

And so Habakkuk, as he thinks about the holiness of God, he's able to understand and process why God needs to use even the Babylonians to be agents of judgment.

It starts to make sense as he starts to think theologically, as he lifts his eyes from ground level and looks to the Lord, things begin to make sense.

And there's a lesson in application. You know, we never get past our doubts if all we do is focus on our doubts.

We never get peace if all we do is fixate on our troubles and keep our eyes at ground level. And so Habakkuk is teaching us to look to the Lord tonight and to consider his nature and to remember his works.

[54 : 15] He's the same God, the ancient of days, the Savior, the sovereign, always working, holy, powerful God.

And as we look to him and think about the world and the situation that we are in, in the light of his character, his nature, his works, as we embrace his promises, as we open his word, that's where we get peace.

peace. Doesn't mean our problems go away. That's where we get peace. And by verse 13a, Habakkuk seems to have some measure of peace.

He understands in some measure what's going on. He has come to a position where he believes that God is still in control. But then going from verse 13b, the second half of verse 13b, through to the end of the chapter and into the beginning of the next chapter, Habakkuk is struggling again.

And so we hear him. He gets to the point at the end of verse 13a and he's at peace. He understands. He's looked to God. He understands in some measure what's going on.

[55 : 35] But then 13b onwards, he's struggling again. And he looks around and again he says, why do you tolerate the treacherous?

Why are you silent? Well, the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves. You've made men like the fish in the sea, like the sea creatures that have no ruler. The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks.

He catches them in his net. He gathers them up in his dragnet. And so he rejoices and is glad. And Habakkuk goes on in his prayer and he's looking around and he says, I'm still struggling. I'm still struggling.

And he's wrestling again with God in prayer. And we sense the struggle and we see what's going on in Habakkuk's life.

He's embracing the promises of God as he comes before God in a quiet place and he gets peace. But then he looks around him again. He sees injustice. He feels wickedness.

[56 : 35] He sees the struggle. And so he needs to go back and wrestle with God in prayer. And in some ways if we were looking for a clear lesson it would have been much easier if Habakkuk chapter 1 finished at verse 13a where Habakkuk has brought his prayer.

He's looked to God and he has peace. It would have been quite nice if it just finished there. And it said Habakkuk then that evening went to bed with a cup of hot chocolate and he had a smile on his face because now he was not troubled anymore.

That would have been nice but that's not the reality of what we read here. And I'm glad it's not because that's not the reality of the Christian life. Because this is our lives.

This is the world we live in. And this is the struggle that we are entering into. We go through many dangers and toils and snares in this world. We see many things that we find hard to understand.

So we need to keep on going into the quiet place to wrestle with God in prayer and we tell him about our struggles and we tell him about all the things that we've experienced and we are grieved over and then as we look to God we embrace the promises of God and they keep us keeping on as we get a fresh vision of God but then the following morning we're back into the world and we're seeing it again and we have to keep going through this.

[58 : 16] And we will have to keep on going through this for as long as we are in this broken world. Habakkuk is teaching us to be people who wrestle with God in prayer and who watch how God is constantly sovereignly at work and who embrace the promises of God as we look to him and as we trust him.

One final thought just as we finish. It seems to me that the hardest thing for Habakkuk to accept was that God would allow his people to suffer under Babylon.

that seems to be what Habakkuk is really struggling with. That God would allow his people to suffer under Babylon so that judgment could be administered and so those who were far away from him could be brought back to that close walk with him.

It's something that Habakkuk he's understanding in some measure but he's struggling with the sufferer. he's struggling with this that the Babylonians the evil men can be allowed to inflict suffering on God's people.

And that's where he was. But if we fast forward 600 plus years and go to Calvary we see suffering again.

[60 : 06] and it's not just the people of God who are suffering. It's the Son of God who is suffering. He's facing judgment.

And it's not just the forces of Babylon it's not just these evil men who are raging against him. It's all the powers of hell that are raging against him. And he's suffering.

And why did he suffer? Well he suffered for us. Jesus at Calvary six centuries later he's suffering for us.

He takes the wrath that our sin deserved. He takes the judgment that our sin caused. He takes our sin into his body on the tree.

And as he did so the father who is as verse 13 puts it the God who is too pure to look upon evil could not look upon his own son.

[61 : 26] Think about that. We sing these verses in that hymn so often. The father turned his face away.

God the father turns his face away from God the son and God the son as he suffers cries out my God my God why have you forsaken me?

and it's because of my sin and yours. He who knew no sin became sin for us.

He endured the forsakenness of God for us so that we who were far away from God could be brought near if we trust in him.

In every Old Testament prophet there are signposts that take us to Jesus. So as we finish tonight let's have our eyes fixed upon Jesus and give thanks for all that he has done to make it possible for us to be saved to be children of God and to find relief from suffering and life that's eternal.

[62 : 54] We pray. Heavenly Father we thank you for this prophecy we thank you that you are a God who understood what the world would look like 640 years before Christ and you understood what the world would look like 2000 plus years after Christ and we thank you Father that you sent your son Jesus into this world so that we could be saved as we look to him we know Lord that we are those who are worthy of judgment for our sin but we thank you that Jesus came to be the one who would take our sin from us if we believe in him we thank you that he is the one who was willing to take that suffering in our place so that if we we can be saved from that suffering and granted life that's eternal we confess

Lord that with your people of old we often stray and we wander we thank you Lord that even in the storms and difficulties of life you are always working to bring us back to yourself and Lord we praise a nation that you would bring us back to yourself we do pray for revival we do so somewhat fearfully because we don't know what the answer will look like but we know that we are far from you and Lord we pray that you would bring us back and we ask this in Jesus name Amen we'll sing to finish 988 from mission praise how deep the Father's love for us how deep the

Father's love for us our past beyond all measure I need to give his only son to give the wretch his treasure the faith the faith of healing blood the Father hurts his wings away as wounds with mar the chosen wine bring many sons to glory behold the man upon our cross like sin upon his shoulders ashamed

I hear my moaning voice all arms among the scoffers it was my sin that held him there until it was accomplished his dying breath has brought me life I know that it is finished I will not boast in anything no gifts no power no wisdom but I will know sin Jesus Christ his death and resurrection why should

I gain from his reward I cannot give an answer but this I know with all my heart his wounds have made my ransom and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more Amen