

Why Injustice? - Book of Habakkuk
Adult Equipping Center – Glenwood Community Church
Class 6 – Sunday, June 5th

Habakkuk's Closing Reaction (3:16-19)

V. 17-18

V. 19

Problem of Pain and Suffering

Christian beliefs are not to be stacked in the warehouse of the mind; they are to be handled and applied to the challenges of life and discipleship. Otherwise they are incapable of bringing comfort and stability, godliness and courage, humility and joy, holiness and faith. (p. 20, *How Long O Lord?*, D.A. Carson)

Christianity that is nothing but certainties quickly becomes haughty and arrogant, rigid and unbending. Worse, it leaves the Christian open to the most excruciating doubt when the vicissitudes of life finally knock out the supporting pillars. The God of such Christianity is just not big enough to be trusted when you are up to your neck in the muck of pain and defeat. Conversely, Christianity that is nothing but mystery leaves nothing to proclaim, and makes faith indistinguishable from blind credulity. (p. 26, *How Long O Lord?*, D.A. Carson)

Question

What might Habakkuk say to a person struggling with the “why God” question? If God is good and powerful, why is there injustice and suffering in the world?

The Problem of pain...

1.is real.

- a. “Habakkuk opens a door to see his house of pain. But his house does not have our address. Rather, we must own our suffering and allow God to speak to us in our particularity...As we move to comfort others, we must never lose sight of the fact that those we might console have their own house of pain that does not carry our address. Our role as comforters is not to make our experience of comfort their experience of comfort. To do so would be to move their pain into our house. Such an action, even with the best of intentions, is a move of deflection. It deflects the pain of the sufferer into the world of one who has already met with God. Rather than bringing their pain into our house, we draw them to God, and sit with them until he arrives at their house. Because all comfort is from God, our role as comforters is to release those who suffer to the God of life, so that he might heal their hurts as he sees fit...as comforters we draw them toward the wounded and risen Christ, who is the master healer, who has wounds himself. This cautionary note on comfort is important, because it shifts our role from that of fixer to friend.”
(p. 211, *Habakkuk*, Heath Thomas – Two Horizons OT Commentary)

2.has an explanation.

Habakkuk rooted the injustice of Judah with their sinfulness toward God. A biblical worldview understands the origin and nature of suffering and injustice. The goodness of God's creation provides a category for why we're offended at injustice and desiring something different.

3. ...betrays our expectations and isn't consistent.

The problem of pain reveals desires for justice and fairness that are difficult to source anywhere other than the character of God. If the problem of pain is directed toward God, Habakkuk found a satisfying answer in relating with God throughout his struggle.

- Dorothy Sayers quoted on p. 331 of Randy Alcorn's, *If God is Good*

4. ...is a problem from a human vantage point.

Habakkuk had a problem because he lacked perspective and information. In the end, he thought silence and "waiting quietly" was the better response. We must admit that the problem may not actually be real from a divine vantage point.

- Alcorn asks: Is God already restraining 99.99 percent of evil and suffering.
 - 15,000 people walked out of the Twin Towers on Sept. 11th
 - Are we focusing on the exception rather than the rule?
 - How much of our lives do we actually spend suffering?
 - How many examples are there in creation of things that preserve life?
 - How much suffering restraint would be enough?
- Habakkuk showed us that God's answers sometimes complicate things more, rather than simplify things. Do we really need an answer?
 - Alcorn: "When a child falls off a bike, she doesn't need her father to say, "Sweetheart, here's why it happened – given your speed and the weight of this bike, it couldn't tolerate the sharp turn and..." No the child simply wants comfort. We don't need explanations; we need, "God who comforts the downcast." (2 Cor. 7:6).
 - A philosopher responds to those who say, 'If I were God, I'd open the sky over NY City and announce to the world that I truly do exist'
"Many times there are people who don't have a clue as to what exactly they would do about the most pressing problems of their own city if they were mayor, or concerning the greatest difficulty facing their state if they were governor. They would probably be quite hesitant if asked how, precisely, they would solve the greatest national crises if they were president, but they have no hesitation whatsoever in venturing to declare how they would solve what may be the single most troubling cosmic religious problem if they were God." Thomas Morris, *Making Sense of It All*, p. 86)

5. ...assumes that suffering is entirely negative.

Habakkuk seems to acknowledge the rightness of Judah's discipline. The rest of Scripture articulates specific long-term benefits to human suffering that are often forgotten if the assessment is short-term.

- 2 Cor. 4:17, James 1, Romans 5

6. ...will be resolved soon.

This is what allows for Habakkuk's waiting posture and resolute joy.

"The delay of reward and retribution never exceeds a life span." (Alcorn)

"The wheels of justice may turn slowly, but they turn surely." (Alcorn, p. 335, *If God Is Good*)

"The duration of suffering is temporary...the relief of suffering will be permanent." (Alcorn, 339)

Closing: Reflections / Summary

Class Potluck: Next Sunday, June 12th – 4:30pm

Cunningham House - 8720 NE 86th St, Vancouver, WA 98662

Please RSVP to bcunningham@glenwoodcc.org or call the church at (360) 571-3300 by Thursday, June 9th. Note what you're up for bringing (side, salad, fruit, etc.). We'll be providing hot dogs and hamburgers, fixings and drinks.

References:

- *God is the Gospel* – John Piper. 2005. Crossway Books
- *Habakkuk* – Heath Thomas. 2018. Eerdmans. The Two Horizons OT Commentary (see also *Faith Amid the Ruins*)
- *How Long O Lord?* – D.A. Carson. 2006. Baker Books.
- *If God is Good* – Randy Alcorn. 2009. Multnomah Books
Song: William Cowper – "Sometime a Light Surprises the Child of God Who Sings"