

## **Living by Faith and Faithfulness**

**Habakkuk 2:1-4**

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Have you ever prayed angry at God demanding answers for the injustice, the hurt you are feeling? Have you ever looked at your life circumstances or what is happening in the world around you, spitfire angry, wondering if God even exists because of the terrible things you are witnessing? Have you ever looked at your world and wondered if the whole world has turned their back on God and have abandoned all sense of righteousness, love, and care for the less fortunate? Then you have a sense of Habakkuk's frame of mind in these writings.

There is a reason why this little three-chapter book in the Bible was banned in Nazi Germany. It gives hope to those facing hopeless situations especially in times of great injustice. It gives us courage to yell and scream at God in the depths of our despair and find the hope to carry on. It reminds us that sometimes things may get worse before they get better, but God is still with us and at work. It tells us to not trust what we see, but rather to see with our eyes of faith and to watch for God in action in the shadows. Like Habakkuk standing in the watchtower demanding a sign.

Habakkuk was probably written just before the fall of Jerusalem which happened in 587 BCE, during the reign of Jehoiakim, a greedy and corrupt puppet king serving the interests of the Egyptians. The Egyptians had been the major power in the region for many years, but the resurgence and growing power of Babylon by king Nebuchadnezzar was beginning to drive the Egyptians back out of Asia and across the Middle East. Now Judah was in the cross hairs to be taken by Babylon.

Habakkuk's writing expresses the emotions of the people as they watch the leaders of these nations fight to maintain power at the expense of the people. There is so many horrible and traumatic things happening around them that Habakkuk cannot look away, he cannot ignore it or unsee the terrible things his own government is doing to the people. It is so blatant that he feels like God is holding his face forcing him to watch. It is so blatant that he can no longer believe the lies and the excuses given by the officials. He must admit that justice has become a joke and the wicked are in control and the people have to brace themselves for the worst yet to come.

Instead of Habakkuk giving up, instead of him abandoning his faith and allowing depression and despair to wrap around him like a cold wind chilling him to the bone, he gets up and watches for God. Sometimes when we are exhausted by the endless prayers and angry tears at God the most faithful thing, the only thing we can do is listen and wait. We watch the horizon like a guard watching for any sign of change, we are silent, watching and listening. All of our senses are on high alert waiting and hoping for the faintest sign of God at work. We are bracing for the worst and hoping for the best, ready to find God amid the dark silence.

Habakkuk reminds us to have patience for that word, the vision from God and when it finally does come, we cannot keep it to ourselves. We need to make it big and plain for others to read even while on the run. That simple and clear message that gives us hope. The word that reminds us that God is on the side of the righteous. The NRSV version reads: Look at the proud! "Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faithfulness." Now if that last phrase sounds familiar it is because this phrase, the "Righteous live by faith" is quoted three times in the New Testament and with the help of Martin Luther, it is often used as a test of true Christianity. Now today many of us may think that faith here is belief and the idea that there is a right or wrong doctrine that one must abide by in order to be saved. But the Hebrew word here. Emunah means firmness, steadiness steadfastness, faithfulness, trust or honesty. It comes from the root word Aman which we derive our word Amen from. This word Emunah is used

in the psalms 22 times of the 49 times in the OT has as its key idea faithfulness or certainty. It is especially important in expressing God's faithfulness as a key divine attribute in the OT. So for our English translation it is better to think of the word as the faithfulness of God. Or as we like to sing.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
there is no shadow of turning with thee.  
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;  
as thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Refrain:

Great is thy faithfulness!  
Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.  
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

The conviction of faith and trust in God that this song elicits is the same energy found in the statement, "The righteous live by faithfulness." We live and draw our life from God's faithfulness toward us. But that is not where Habakkuk starts. He starts raging against the injustices he is witnessing and questioning where God is at. Like us, Habakkuk is disturbed by the violence and destruction he witnesses. He is concerned that justice is corrupted, preventing people from experiencing the fullness of life. He laments and calls out to God. He demands a response. Because clearly this is not what God envisions for creation. And God agrees. God responds that Habakkuk will receive a vision that he will declare to the people clearly.

It is this vision of a new way of being in the world that creates change, creates revolution and reform. We as faithful people should not ignore or deny the reality of the rage we see in the world. But rather, see it as an opportunity to once again assert God's truth of love into a hurting world. That God's faithfulness to bring love and

healing will prevail. We need to order our lives according to that faithfulness of God. We live into that truth through our very lives.

Just as we gather around this communion table with Christians around the world yet see the fractured state of the world and the church and grieve. We cry out against the sins being done in the name of God and demand Justice. We cry out because we know the truth of God's Righteousness and Faithfulness in the world. In the spirit of that Hope we gather in spirit with faithful Christians around the world to cry out, to pray and to celebrate this eternal truth born anew in our hearts.