

We're going to start a series on Habakkuk today. Before we get started, I simply want to explain why I would teach a minor prophet. There are some real gems in Habakkuk, and there's some real honesty there that I just appreciate. I want to explain to you why we're going to do Habakkuk outside of the fact that we believe that the Bible is God speaking to us and that we learn about the nature and character of God via Scripture. We want to teach all of Scripture, I want to tell you why Habakkuk in particular is important for us, important for you, important for me and why it's a gem in this treasure chest that we need to examine.

To do that, I'm going to have to set up some history for you. I did a good portion of this before our Christmas Eve services. We talked about the angst of waiting and the promise that God had made Abram concerning the nation of Israel that they would be a kingdom and that they would be God's chosen people. We talked about the thousands of years of that not working itself out well by them ending up in slavery, being led out of slavery only to wander through the desert until that generation died off only to go into the Promised Land where it was violence upon violence. They were constantly warring, constantly fighting. God finally gives them king Saul at their demand, and Saul was unbelievably disappointing as a king. Then we get to David, and in David things began to change. The Bible is clear that David is a man after God's own heart. Now here's why I think that's so important for you to know and understand. He had huge character flaws. He had massive, massive shortcomings and character flaws. So if you're going, "No, that's me," David committed adultery and then had the husband of the woman he committed adultery with killed. I think he probably beats you. Maybe I'm wrong, and maybe you've got an ace of spades to throw on that, but we haven't met. Then what does God say about this man? "He is a man after My own heart." Now David becomes king of Israel, and his reign is marked by a great deal of bloodshed in that he is constantly at war with the Philistines and the other nations. He is a legit, straight up warrior. He is a fighter in every sense of the word, a leader in every sense of the word and a worshiper in every sense of the word. I've always been drawn to David because of the fact that he's unbelievably honest as a man who seeks after God's heart. This is why I love the Psalms, because he almost comes off schizophrenic. Literally you're on one page and he's like, "How long, O Lord, will You forsake me?" Turn the page and it's, "You're so near, I can hardly breathe. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?" Next page, "Will You ever listen to me again?" Next page, "You have never left me." And on and on it goes. We're drawn to that guy because we can go, "Absolutely." We're drawn to that guy because those of us who follow Jesus have had those times where it felt like He was in the room with us, and there are times we follow God and we have felt like the only one who was hearing our prayers was our cat or our dog. We've all been there. We've all experienced that. And that's why so many of us are drawn to the Psalms, because we can see our lives there. With Paul we see him as standing on the Temple Mount with his cape blowing in the wind saying, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." We want to be there, but we don't know that we are. So that's why I think we're drawn to David.

So David reigns and rules, and he pleads with God to let him build the temple. He has established Israel's borders. There's still a bit of violence near the end of his life, but it's settling down. It's apparent that Israel is going to win its war with the Philistines. As they're going into peace, David begins to beg God to let him build the temple, a home for God outside of the tent of meetings. He wants to build a legitimate temple where the nations could come and worship Yahweh. And God tells him no. He says, "There is too much blood on your hands. You have spilled too much blood in your reign. I'm going to let your boy Solomon build the temple." So David gets to be a part of gathering the supplies for the building of the temple. There is gold and jewels, and it's going to be an ornate structure. And then David dies

as quick as that. One of the things that will teach you about the brevity of life is simply watch how powerful men of God die in the Bible. They die in a verse and then the story goes on. It's true in the Bible, and it's true of your life and mine. Getting that in our heads will be unbelievably helpful. So Solomon reigns and rules, and he builds the temple. It is the pinnacle of Israel's existence. They are at peace, they are building, the economy is flourishing and good things are happening. So if you know there are promises, this is what they have been waiting for for a thousand years. Their people, their religious leaders are saying, "This is coming. . .this is coming. . .this has been promised to us by God." And they keep walking and trudging and trying to get there, and then all of a sudden there it is. The temple is built, peace is had and Solomon's rule is a thing of beauty. There are not a lot of threats, not a lot of problems. It was really a golden age in Israel's history. Now if you look at Solomon's writings, you can kind of see clouds on the horizon. He writes in Ecclesiastes, "Who cares how much stuff you make and how much stuff you build if your sons are idiots?" That's a paraphrase, but that's pretty much what he says. "Because all that's going to happen is you're going to die and all that you build, all that you made is going to be given to morons." So if you read that, it comes across like Solomon's having a bad day, like his son wouldn't listen to him so he wrote a stanza there in Ecclesiastes.

But if you'll keep following the story, Solomon dies. And soon after Solomon dies, Israel begins to disintegrate from the inside. His sons are debating, they're infighting and it doesn't take long for Israel to split into two separate countries. You had Israel in the north made up of two tribes and Judah in the south made of ten tribes. Now it doesn't take long for Israel to just disappear, to be captured by the Babylonians and led off into exile. And that left Judah all alone, falling more and more into idolatry. In fact, by the time we pick up, king Amon has built other temples in Judah, there are temples to other gods, people are blatantly idolatrous and the temple that Solomon built, this monument to God's fulfillment of His promises has begun to fall apart and become dilapidated. In the end, king Amon dies, and his son Josiah takes over the throne at the age of eight. Now I have a seven-year-old. This whole idea to me blows my mind. I'm just trying to think of a country where Audrey ruled it. It would probably be really cool for a little while, and then it would fall apart.

Now we don't know what happened, but Josiah, at the age of sixteen, devotes his mind and his heart to God. He begins to lead all these reforms among God's people to repent of their idolatry and turn back towards the Lord. And he's got a little bit of help with him. There's another prophet raging at this time by the name of Jeremiah. Jeremiah begins to call Israel to repentance, begins to call them back to the living God. Josiah decides that he needs to fix up the temple that has become broken down. So they get in there, start to shine it, start to clean it and start to straighten it out, and the high priest in that reconstruction finds a scroll. Now all the Bible tells us is that he finds a scroll. Regardless of the historian, whether it be a Christian theologian or just a secular historian, everybody agrees that that scroll was more than likely the Pentateuch, the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis through Deuteronomy. And Josiah opens it up with the high priest, they read it and they weep as they read it. Because the law has been designed to show us all our shortcomings and failures when it comes to being perfect as God has called us to be perfect. So they read it and weep. And then Josiah calls the entire nation together. They all come in and Josiah and the high priest read the scroll to the people, and they're devastated. He calls a passover meal, points people back to God's deliverance of them and calls them back into their covenant relationship with God. There is mass repentance and what can only be described as an Old Testament revival. In almost every domain of culture, there is this call back to God. I've been just thinking the last couple of weeks how to even imagine this in our culture. It would literally be the government, the sectors of education, the sectors of science, the sectors of agriculture, every domain of society agreeing at one time and at once, "We need to repent and turn our faith back towards God." And that's what's happening.

Now let me get us to Habakkuk. There were three main powers in the world at that time. Judah is not one of those main powers. Judah is like Rhode Island. No one is afraid of Rhode Island. It's a beautiful place, but there's like 109 people there. On a good day, I think I could take Rhode Island. I don't need anybody to flank them. Just give me a stick and turn

me loose, and I think I've got a good shot. Now, Judah is small and almost insignificant. You've got three main powers. One of them is Assyria. They are king of the hill but in sharp decline. Another is the Babylonians or the Chaldeans, and they are brutal and on the rise. They are very violent and very aggressive. Think of what we would look at in regards to Iran or North Korea, except blatantly aggressive in that they are conquering and enslaving the countries around them. That's your Babylonians or Chaldeans. They are brutal, aggressive, unbelievably violent and by no standard of judgment would you call them good people. It's kind of a people group that, if fire fell from heaven and burned them up, we'd just go, "Yeah. That makes sense." And then you had Egypt. Egypt was a major player, but also in decline.

So Necho II, Pharaoh of Egypt, sends a letter to Josiah and says he wants to take his army through Judah and into Assyria. We don't even know what he was going to do up there with his army. But he asks for permission, and Josiah refuses Necho II's request. "You will not march your army through Judah." This enrages Necho II, because Rhode Island isn't going to tell him what he can do with his army. So he marches his army straight through Judah anyway. Josiah's not having it, so he calls together the army in Judah and meets the armies of Egypt in the valley of Megiddo. And you can't do anything but like Josiah. Josiah disguises himself as a soldier and joins the ranks of his men. Now you and I, from up on high, can go, "That's probably pretty stupid. You're the king. You should be up high looking at the battle." But to a man in the trenches, to have your king go, "No, I'm not asking you to die. I'm willing to die with you," That's just an unbelievably beautiful, brilliant thing. And this is Josiah. He's got his sword on, he's got his uniform on and he's going to charge the field with his men. In the middle of the battle of Megiddo, Josiah, this reformer, this man being used by God to call people to repentance and life in Him, is killed.

He had sons, and they immediately take one of his sons, Jehoahaz, and put him on the throne. He will not rule long. He immediately begins to operate in the order of his grandfather Amon and not like his father. He begins to lead Israel back into idolatry. Now after Necho II was done with whatever he was doing in Assyria, he comes back through Judah, stops by and takes Jehoahaz off the throne. He takes him as prisoner and pulls him back down into Egypt where he is going to die in captivity, and then he puts Josiah's other son, Jehoiakim, on the throne. He is more of a moron than his moron brother. For the next eleven years, he will lead Judah straight into their destruction. Where all the reforms that Josiah made, all the push that Josiah made, all the Godhonoring, God-exalting reform, all the progress was completely blown to pieces.

And then you've got our boy Habakkuk. Let's look at it. Habakkuk 1, starting in verse 1. "The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw." That's all we know about Habakkuk, his name. We don't know who his father was. We don't know what his occupation was. We know the time frame that he's asking this is in the latter half of the story I just told you. So let's look at verse 2. "O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted." If we could take ourselves and put us in Habakkuk's heart, in Habakkuk's mind, where you've seen idolatry reign and as a man of God you have begged God to do something about it, only to begin to watch God answer those prayers, to begin to see that movement, begin to see people turn their hearts towards God, turn their minds towards God, be on the cusp of a revival that rivaled anything except early in Israel's history, only to watch it all unravel right before your eyes and then get worse than it ever was. He's going, "What are You doing? How could You let this happen? Are You going to do nothing about this?" And then here's a real key component for you to keep in your heads for the weeks to come. This violence, this oppression, this justice not going out has nothing to do with the Assyrians, it has nothing to do with the Egyptians and it has nothing to do with the Chaldeans. It has strictly to do with God's people. He's saying, "Why do You let Your people act like this? Why do You let Your people live like this? Are You not just? Are You not God? How can You idly sit by and let this happen?"

Now here's why I think Habakkuk is such an important book. On the road to Christian maturity, we'll almost all hit spots like this. On the road to Christian maturity, we're almost all going to hit these spots where something happens, something goes on, something occurs, either with us or someone we love, that has us going, "What in the world are You doing? If You're loving, if You're gracious, if You're good, then how can this be happening?" And if you pay attention to secular arguments against there being a divine being, tell me this isn't one that gets mentioned almost every time. "If there's some loving, all-knowing, all-powerful God, explain to me Haiti. Explain to me the atrocities against mankind." Now what you'll never hear is the fact that the bloodiest movements in the 21st century were both led out by people who believed there was no God, Stalin and Mao. But this is a question that constantly gets thrown people of faith. "Why does God let these things happen? Why do these things occur?" And it has been my experience that a great deal of those on the road to maturity will hit a moment where we don't understand what God's doing. And I love the fact that Habakkuk is just honest here. Notice that he's not playing games. He's confused, he's a bit frustrated and he's actually bringing that before God. What a crazy idea. I thought you were just supposed to hide that and be quiet and keep singing. But Habakkuk comes to God and says, "Are You going to do nothing about this? Are You listening to what we're saying at all?" And if we were honest, we've been there or we're going to be there eventually.

So more than I want to break down exegetically Habakkuk's complaint, I'd rather tell you what happens when you're unwilling to be honest with God and with one another. It creates a series of problems that in the end creates this perfect storm where you don't have a shot at maturity and you don't have a shot at worship and sustaining grace through difficult days. Here are three things that occur when you and I refuse to be honest with God about where we are, about what we're thinking, about what we're feeling and about where we're walking. If you refuse to be honest with God and others here's what happens.

Number one, we cannot grow intellectually or in our hearts. If I could church-ize that for you, I'd simply say this. Worship becomes an impossibility. Now when difficulty, doubt and fear strike, you have this unreal opportunity to dive into the nature and character of God. Now I've pleaded with you for eight years to really guard your mind and heart when it comes to books you read or sermons you listen to. Messages like, "Seven Ways to Be a Good Man" or "Three Ways to Remove All Doubt," that kind of programmatic showmanship in the end has very little value in the day of storm. What happens when you get punched in the soul, when you have doubt, when you have frustrations, when you have fears and you dive into the nature of God, you see how infinitely large He is and how tiny you are. And there's this strange comfort that occurs in that moment.

Several years ago, I got a call from a group out of Hawaii who wanted me to come do some teaching. So Lauren and I gathered and prayed for about six seconds before we told them we'd be there. Then we were researching what was going on in Oahu, and we found out that while we were there, the Triple Crown of surfing was going to be happening on the north shore. So all these big wave riders were going to be out in the north shore. So Lauren and I decided to take the car north and check out the Triple Crown of surfing. So we went out to the north shore and watched those guys ride those waves, and there were a couple of things that happened. I like the idea of surfing. I've tried it. I'm not athletic, and it doesn't go well. I just almost die. My prayer life increases exponentially while I try. But I sat in that chair next to my beautiful wife watching those guys and I thought, "I would not get in that water. I don't want to swim in that." Even the sound was terrifying. So for how easy they make it look, in that moment, I'm going, "I don't even want to get my feet in there." It was nothing but God's subtle way of saying, "I'll kill every one of you if I want to." So here's what happens in that moment. In that moment when you're in front of something that's so unbelievably large and powerful, you're reminded of your place in the universe. In that moment, you're not all-powerful, you're not all-conquering. In that moment, you become aware. Nobody looks at the Grand Canyon and boasts on what a good year they had. Nobody stands on that little glass bridge that stands out across the Grand Canyon now and goes, "I finished my dissertation. Think about that." You feel small. Even the bravest of us are humbled by that. I fly into Seattle several times a year for stuff I do up there.

When you're flying into Seattle, you fly right past Mt. Rainier. And it never looks right. You're probably miles and miles away, but it just doesn't look right. It's massive and it shoots above the clouds, and it makes me feel tiny. In that moment, we're reminded, and worship happens. Out of the overflow of feeling how small I am and how big those things are, I'm just in awe and my heart is stirred. That's why you go on vacation to the beach. That's why you go on vacation to the mountains. Very few people go on vacation to the plains. You go to what you witness and what you see is more powerful than you, larger than you, and you get caught up in it and just stare at it. It's spectacular. Now what happens when there's pain, sorrow, hurt or fear, if we press into Him, there are answers to difficult questions. You just don't suppress them. You run into them and you get to know the character and nature of God. Because upon getting to know His size, His might and His strength, all situations become not only bearable but maybe even fountains of joy. And for some of you, that might sound insane, but I promise you it's true. So that's the first problem.

The first problem actually leads to the second problem. If you're not honest with God and honest with others about where you really are, you're forced to pretend, specifically in the religious arena, that all is okay when it's not. Now let me tell you why this is foolish. To get from point A to point B, you have to know where point A is and you have to know where point B is. If you don't understand either one of those, you're not going anywhere. You can't tell me how to get to Coppell if I don't know where I currently am. Because if I said, "Hey, how do you get to Coppell," you'd go, "Where are you coming from? Which direction are you coming from?" And if I went, "Well I don't know," you can't tell me how to get to Coppell. You need to know where I am to get me where I'm going. We need to know where we're we are and where we're going. So if you can't be honest about where you are, you're simply going to pretend that you're something you're not. Let me tell you why that's dangerous. It's very easy to get the routine down in Christian circles.

I grew up in a traditional Baptist church. Nobody even needed to tell me when to stand up. I knew. It was the same every week. You're going to stand, there's going to be an offertory song that you sit down, they pass the plate, you stand and they sing a song, then you sit down and then the sermon is on. There was a rhythm that was established where I never needed to be told when to stand and when to sit. I just knew. It was a traditional Baptist church, so there wasn't any hand raising or anything like that. If you did raise your hands, you were like a Baptical and your hands were down in front of you so nobody else could see. And even then, he was a distraction to us. We were like, "Weirdo. What are you doing loving the Lord like that? You love the Lord with your mind, dummy. If you want to flake out and dance, you do it somewhere else." So I knew if you liked the message, you would say, "Amen," but I learned a little bit in that you sometimes just said "Amen" because that's when you woke up. Now the same is true about the Village. You can learn our language here. You can learn what we say, how we do things, the language we give to things and not understand or practice any of it. And when that occurs, it's exhausting. Because no one knows who you are. So at that point, you're not confident in God's love for you, you're not confident in people loving and being gracious to you, because if anyone shows you grace, shows you mercy, shows you love, it's easy to just push it away because they don't really know you. If they really knew you, then there's no way they would be gracious like that. So you continue to pretend, you're far from the Lord and far from others, loneliness sets in and this things gets exhausting. I can't tell you the number of guys that I've loved on and walked with over the years that in the end struggled with secret sin for years and years and never told anyone anything because they thought everyone was okay. They didn't think anyone else struggled their issue, they didn't think anyone else had a problem like they had and they didn't think anyone else wrestled with anger, lust, pornography or whatever. They felt all alone in it, because the church had become just a very, very pretty place.

And that leads me to the third thing that happens when you refuse to be honest with God and others, and I think this is by far the biggest one, the one that can devastate the most. In the end, you'll come over here and whatever your fear is, whatever your doubt is, whatever your addiction is, whatever your issue is, all your vitality, all your energy and all your effort will go into subduing this thing, hiding this thing, avoiding this thing or trying to overcome this thing. And the thing you'll forget about is the cross. The objective evidence of God's love and care for you is the cross of Jesus Christ.

And unfortunately for so many of us, we become issue-driven and not cross-driven. So you're going to fail, you're going to stumble, you're going to have these moments where you fall short and you're going to have these moments where you're going to fall back into bad patters. And if you don't understand the cross, if you don't understand the mercy of God given to us in Jesus, then you'll try to muster more strength to overcome this thing that you cannot beat. So you take your eyes off of the objective evidence of God's love for you, that Jesus died while you were at your worst. Because if your eyes are on that, everything changes.

Growing up in a traditional Baptist church, we sang the song Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. . . Look full in His wonderful face. . . And the things of this earth grow strangely dim. . . In the light of His glory and grace." So how does sin lose its power in our lives? Not by us disciplining ourselves in such a way that our sin doesn't own us. It doesn't happen by mowing over the weeds. It happens by marveling at the gift of mercy and grace of the cross of Jesus Christ. That's what makes sin lose its power – when Jesus becomes more lovely and more attractive than the sin, than the fear, then the doubt. In that moment, when we see the cross, understand that whatever this is it wasn't and isn't punitive after the initial shock wears off.

I'll put myself in the story. I learned a little over a year ago that I had a non-encapsulated type of cancer in my brain. They cut out what they could, put me on eighteen months of chemo and gave me a two or three year expiration date. That was a punch to the soul. When you hear that, no one goes, "Praise God! That's awesome. Hey, thanks for that gift. I was asking for something like this for Christmas." That was a punch to the soul, but here's what happened as the dust settled. I am well aware that this is not punitive, that I am not being punished, that God in the heavens is not going, "I told you to share the gospel with that guy on the treadmill at the gym. Oh, you don't want to have a quiet time in the mornings? How about a little bit of oligodendroglioma! I told you that I wanted more of the money that I'm giving you." It's not punitive. Do you know how I know that? Because all the wrath of God towards me was absorbed in that cross when Jesus hung on it. So I have nothing on my life but mercy, which means that this road of mine, wherever it leads and however it leads, has everything to do with God's glory and my joy and that God, for whatever reason, has decided to allow. So this is important. I do not believe that God gave me cancer, but He absolutely didn't stop it and could have. He watched those cells divide abnormally and let it happen. Because if He didn't see it or couldn't stop it, then He's not God. It's not like He's going, "Well Chandler, We'd love to help you, but this is genetic and We don't do genetic stuff. We can't get down in the DNA like that. Here's what I'll do though. I'll enlighten some guys out at Duke, I'll try to work with some guys out in California and then I'm giving a little bit of information to MD Anderson and Mayo. And maybe I'll see you in a couple of years, or it may be in a decade. We're just going to have to let this thing play out, bro. Good luck." No, He knew and He didn't stop it, which means this is a part of God's plan for my life. "Well Chandler, you could die." I was always going to die. It's weird to me that people go, "You could die." You too! It could happen today. So you're going to die, I'm going to die, this is simply going to happen. Here's what I know. This is not about God's wrath. God loves my wife and children more than I do, He has a plan for their life He's working and in the scheme of things, when all is said and done and we're all home, it will make perfect sense. What I do know is that He has given me today, so I'm going to tell you to trust in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Here's my hope. My hope is that you grow tired of playing church, that it just exhausts you and that all the trash that you've picked up over the years about not being able to be honest or having to be perfect would get lost in this series. It's simply not true. God delights in showing mercy to those who do not deserve mercy. It's the whole point of the Bible. Didn't even Jesus say it's not the well that need a doctor, but it's the sick? Look at who God calls to Himself as major players in the Scriptures. To the man, they have monumental shortcomings. To the woman, they have monumental shortcomings. There is no sin in your life with more power than the cross of Jesus Christ. And what's heartbreaking for me is some of you, despite my pleading with you, are going to have to learn this the hard way. You are going to have to see your arrogant pride crushed before you before you put your trust in Him and Him alone. And when I talk to younger

singles, I'll always say, "Some of you are going to have to lose your first marriage. You're literally going to have to see your first marriage unravel before you hear me." For some of you of you, your kid is going to have to get sick. And these are things that only happen in God's mercy if God, in His mercy, wants to draw you unto Himself. Because if you'll follow biblical wrath, biblical wrath is just, "Oh, you want that? Chase it." So if God, in His mercy, gives you a thorn in the flesh, that will be the breakdown of your pride. My hope is that you'll just hear and the Holy Spirit will open up your mind and heart towards God and you'd simply surrender. So my hope is that today might be ended with you turning to the buddy who brought you, the group that you're in or the community that you're in and going, "Man, this thing happened back then and I just don't trust God right now" or "I don't understand what He's doing in this. I don't like what's happening" and that you'll let them help you and lead you to deeper waters.

So may He use Habakkuk to ruin us and to make us wholly dependent on Him. The crazy thing we'll talk about next week is that God hears Habakkuk and He answers him. But that's next week. Let's pray. "Father, help us. We are prone to trust our own strength. We are prone to trust our own might. Help us follow You, serve You and trust You honestly and openly. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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