

“Because I Said So”

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Habakkuk 1:2-17, 2:2-3, 3:16-19

Let us pray: *Guide us, O Lord, by your living Word, and silence within us all voices but yours. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

I tend to ask questions that make you think. I'm the type of person that notices subtle things in culture that don't really make sense, though we've accepted them as a way of life. I ask myself things like, If you got into a taxi and the driver began driving backwards, would he owe you money? If you're at a movie theater, which of the arm rests belongs to you? Why does grape-flavored medicine taste nothing like actual grapes? Why do people say "heads up" when they really want you to duck or get out of the way? How many seconds should one wait before moving after hearing the three chimes at the end of the church service?

But just as I ask these deep, thought-provoking questions, I am also a person of concrete answers. I like to get definitive answers to my questions. I'm never satisfied with vagueness. I want specifics. For example, if I were to ask about when the next Congregational Fellowship Event is going to be, I wouldn't want to hear, "in a few days." I probably wouldn't even be satisfied with hearing "Wednesday," no; I'd want to hear "Wednesday, August 19th, at 6:00pm."

As children we all experienced this. If you're anything like me, you got intensely frustrated when you would ask your parents why they were making you do something and their only response was, "Because I said so." However, as a parent I now understand the reasoning behind such a response. As a parent, there are generally three reasons I would ever say to my children, "Because I said so." The first would be if I genuinely didn't know the answer to the question. The second would be if they had already gotten the answer from their mother. And the third, and most likely reason, would be just to get them to stop asking questions.

But like children, we continue to ask questions. For many of us, the questions are less comical, and deal with things much more serious. It seems as though every time I turn on the television, I'm confronted with catastrophe. Natural disasters, war, hunger, crime, and poverty frequent the images we see and the things we read on a daily basis. And all of these things prompt within us a question, a question people have asked for thousands of years – "Why?" And as followers and believers of the Christian faith, we take the question to a new level – "Why is God letting this happen?"

The events of September 11th, 2001 made this question paramount in the lives of all Americans. We all asked "Why?" But a lot of us even asked, "God, how can you let this happen? How can you tolerate this? Aren't you supposed to be a sovereign God who doesn't let stuff like this happen? God, where are you? What are you doing?"

Fortunately for us, the answer to these questions can be found in Scripture. And we've overlooked it. We've missed it. The reason we've overlooked it is because it's found in a tiny book of only three chapters in the Bible. One of the so-called "Minor Prophets." It's the book of Habakkuk. And let me assure you – there's much more to this book than meets the eye. Now before we get into this, I want to give you a little bit of background information on this guy. Habakkuk lived in a time of complete turmoil. His nation was being invaded by the Chaldeans, who were pretty intense. They had cut off the economy, killed thousands of innocent people, and were setting up their own regime right outside of Habakkuk's door. There was complete chaos going on around him.

The book of Habakkuk is written in a fascinating way, you see it's an actual conversation between Habakkuk and God. But as you'll see as we read this, it's not your ordinary conversation.

*² 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?*

*³ Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrong?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.*

*⁴ Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.¹*

Habakkuk is not happy with God, and rightly so. This man is in the middle of injustice, destruction and violence, and he questions God. It's almost as if he's crying out, "God, where are you? Why are you sitting around ignoring me? What have I done to have to witness this?"

Have you ever asked these questions? Have you ever wondered where God is in the midst of chaos? Have you ever watched the news or read the newspaper and had your own faith

¹ Habakkuk 1:2-4

challenged because of the level of devastation that is evident in our world? In reality, we've all asked those questions, and we don't have to deal with the things Habakkuk did. We've always read about God's omnipotent presence and Sovereignty, yet we still wonder where He is – what He's doing while the world as we know it is embedded with chaos. But do we ever really get an answer? Does God tell us anything?

The answer to Habakkuk's complaint is not what he expected, nor is it what we would expect.

⁵ *"Look at the nations and watch—
and be utterly amazed.
For I am going to do something in your days
that you would not believe,
even if you were told.*

⁶ *I am raising up the Babylonians,
that ruthless and impetuous people,
who sweep across the whole earth
to seize dwelling places not their own.*

⁷ *They are a feared and dreaded people;
they are a law to themselves
and promote their own honor.*

⁸ *Their horses are swifter than leopards,
fiercer than wolves at dusk.
Their cavalry gallops headlong;
their horsemen come from afar.
They fly like a vulture swooping to devour;*

⁹ *they all come bent on violence.
Their hordes advance like a desert wind
and gather prisoners like sand.*

¹⁰ *They deride kings
and scoff at rulers.
They laugh at all fortified cities;
they build earthen ramps and capture them.*

¹¹ *Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—
guilty men, whose own strength is their god."²*

² Habakkuk 1:5-11

We read here that God is planning a massive invasion by the Babylonians. And from what we've just read, these are not a peaceful bunch of folks. These people are ruthless warriors. They are coming in to seize what has already been seized, to overthrow what has already been overthrown, to destroy everything in their path and to make people cower in their presence.

So let's go back to Habakkuk for a second. What we've heard so far is that this man is terrified and is looking to God Almighty for answers. He needs to know what to expect next, how to deal with it, and why it's happening in the first place. Habakkuk is desperate for answers, for concrete, defined answers. These questions he's asking are huge, and he's asking them of God! But God says, in a way, the worst is yet to come.

So we read Habakkuk's response in verses 12-17:

*¹² O LORD, are you not from everlasting?
My God, my Holy One, we will not die.
O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment;
O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.*

*¹³ Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
you cannot tolerate wrong.
Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?
Why are you silent while the wicked
swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*

*¹⁴ You have made men like fish in the sea,
like sea creatures that have no ruler.*

*¹⁵ 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.*

*¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net
and burns incense to his dragnet,
for by his net he lives in luxury
and enjoys the choicest food.*

*¹⁷ Is he to keep on emptying his net,
destroying nations without mercy?³*

³ Habakkuk 1:12-17

It's almost as if Habakkuk is saying, "...wait, what? Did I hear you right? This sovereign God whose eyes are too pure to look on evil, you're sending in more violence to fix this violence? And those who execute judgment are going to be the ones enjoying the wealth and the food and the material pleasures? What kind of sense does that make?" But if we put ourselves in the shoes of the prophet, we would probably be saying the exact same thing.

But then something incredibly profound happens. The next words from God give Habakkuk a challenge. In verses 2 & 3 of the second chapter:

*² Then the LORD replied:
"Write down the revelation
and make it plain on tablets
so that a herald may run with it.*

*³ For the revelation awaits an appointed time;
it speaks of the end
and will not prove false.
Though it linger, wait for it;
it will certainly come and will not delay.⁴*

If we translated this to modern day, it might say something like, "Just you wait. You have no idea what I have in store. But it's going to happen. You can even write it down." How in the world is that supposed to be a comforting answer to a person like Habakkuk? How in the world is that supposed to be a comforting answer to people like us? We need more than that, we need specifics! We need the who, what, where, when, how, and why of this situation, not a general idea! God is basically saying to Habakkuk, "trust me – because I said so."

In the rest of Chapter 2, God lists several woes that explain in detail the different ways the Babylonians will be judged for their actions. He says that although He is bringing them in to further the devastation, they will in time be judged accordingly. Now Habakkuk was a prophet. So he had a particular gift. Not only did he talk directly to God, but God talked directly to him. It was a two-way conversation. So at this point in the conversation, what would you want to say to God? The easy question would be, "So why don't you just stop all this madness right now? You're God! Why drag it out while so many more innocent people die, while we don't have any crops to produce food, while we can't even step outside our door for fear of violence? God, why???"

But this is where the story takes a drastic turn. It leaves the norm behind. It leaves our culture behind. What happens next is, for me, one of the greatest moments in all of Scripture.

⁴ Habakkuk 2:2-3

Habakkuk undergoes a mental battle with himself and his questions – and finally we come to the conclusion of the book, in Chapter 3, verses 16-19.

*¹⁶ I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound;
decay crept into my bones,
and my legs trembled.
Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity
to come on the nation invading us.*

*¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,*

*¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

*¹⁹ The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to go on the heights.⁵*

I just want you to sit in the moment of verse 17 for just a second:

*¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,*

In other words, though everything in my life is in turmoil, though I'm witnessing death and destruction and can't see any end in sight, and though you've not really helped explain any of this to me, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my Savior.

I don't know where you are right now in your life. You may be on the fence about God for this very reason. You may be a devout Christian. But whatever the case, we've all had times when we've questioned God's presence and motives. But God has already said to us, "Because I said so." It's written like this in the 4th Chapter of Philippians – Rejoice in the Lord always. No

⁵ Habakkuk 3:16-19a

matter what. Regardless of the fact that your world is crumbling down and you don't know if you're going to make it until tomorrow – rejoice in the Lord always. Old Testament scholar and Author Walter Brueggemann describes these final verses of the book of Habakkuk as “a message of profound hope in a circumstance of profound despair.”⁶Indeed they are.

Friends, it's through this amazing, tiny little book, through a conversation between God and a prophet many people don't even know existed, that we find hope. Amidst the chaos, we find peace. And we can rejoice in the Lord, we can be joyful in God our Savior because God said so through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. And all the justification we need is because God said so. So when you don't understand, when it just doesn't make sense – rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord always, because He said so.

Let us pray: Sovereign God, you created all that we see and all that we experience in our lives. Through your mighty power, calm the storms of our lives with the reassurance that it is only a matter of time before you make all things new. Help us to realize that your actions are not on our time, but your time, which is far beyond our understanding. But keep us mindful of the fact that no matter what we are going through, you will never, ever, let us go, and by that fact, we should rejoice always. In the name of Christ Jesus, whose sacrifice sustains us all, Amen.

⁶ Brueggemann, W. (2003). *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.