

THE RIGHTEOUS AND FAITH

“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright — but the righteous will live by his faith—” (Hab 2:4)

HABAKKUK WAS PERPLEXED

Yes! Judah had sinned and God was going to punish them, but Habakkuk wondered why would God use the Babylonians to do it? The Babylonians were more wicked than the Jews! Their own strength was their god (Hab. 1:11). Yet God was going to allow the wicked Babylonians to sweep down on His own people like wolves at dusk (Hab. 1:8). That’s why Habakkuk asked God: **“Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” (Hab 1:13)**

God answered the prophet and said:

“Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.” (Hab 2:2)

The answer of God was both bold and urgent. It was to be written in large letters so it would be easy to read. It was so urgent that it was to be carried by a herald who was running.

GOD WAS GOING TO JUDGE BABYLON TOO - BUT THE JUDGEMENT OF BABYLON WOULD NOT HAPPEN IMMEDIATELY

“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.” (Hab 2:3)

The judgement of Babylon was certain, but it would only come at God’s appointed time. The righteous were going to have to wait! This is key to understand what it means “The righteous shall live by faith”. The righteous know that God always tells the truth! The righteous know that God will never be proven false. God’s judgement on Babylon would certainly come! Those who had faith in God to fulfill His promises were energized by what they believed. The righteous do live by faith!

NOTE THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE “PUFFED UP” AND THE “RIGHTEOUS”

“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright — but the righteous will live by his faith— “ (Hab 2:4)

The Babylonians were puffed up and proud. All nations without God are invariably “puffed up and proud”. But the “righteous”, by contrast, are not proud. The confidence of the righteous is not in themselves. Their confidence is in God, and they patiently wait for God to bring to pass what He has promised!

FIVE WOES FOR THOSE WHO FORGET GOD

God encouraged Habakkuk by pronouncing 5 woes upon the ungodly. Please note:

- Woe to him who piles up stolen goods (Hab. 2:6).
- Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain (Hab. 2:9).
- Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed (Hab. 2:12).
- Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor (Hab. 2:15).
- Woe to him who says to wood, “Come to life” or to lifeless stone “wake up” (Hab. 2:19).

APPLICATION TO BABYLON

These five woes apply to all sinners, but especially to Babylon. The fact that God judges nations as well as individuals is evident. Remember, for example, that even though the descendants of Abram were going to be enslaved, God promised to punish the nation that enslaved them (Gen. 15:14). God’s judgement on Egypt was over 400 years in coming, but it did come! The righteous, of course, never doubted that God would keep His word. The righteous live by faith! As we have said, while these five woes apply to all nations, they are particularly appropriate for God’s judgement upon Babylon. Please consider:

- The pride of the Babylonians cannot be denied! When the army of the Medes and Persians camped outside Babylon, King Belshazzar was so “puffed up” that he took the occasion to have a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles (Dan. 5:1).
- Further indication of the king’s blasphemous pride is the fact that he dared to drink wine from the sacred vessels that his father had stolen from the temple of God in Jerusalem. Note: **“While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.” (Dan 5:2-3)**
- These proud and foolish idolaters gave more honor to dead statues of wood and stone than to the Living God. **“As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.” (Dan 5:4)**
- The time for judgement had come and: **“Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lamp stand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.” (Dan 5:5-6)**

IT WAS TOO LATE FOR BABYLON

God loves the world and wants everybody to be saved. **“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to**

perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9) There is a time, however, when it is too late for repentance, and that time had come for Babylon. The righteous were not surprised by God’s judgment upon Babylon. They expected it! Habakkuk was not the only prophet who predicted the downfall of Babylon. (See Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51, Etc.)

Isaiah lived some 200 years before Babylon was conquered. Yet, he not only predicted the defeat of Babylon, he even predicted the name of the man God used to do it (See Isaiah 44:28 - 45:1). Cyrus the Persian was the man raised up by God to conquer Babylon. He was called “God’s Shepherd” and is the only gentile named as the Lord’s “anointed”. As a further note of interest, Isaiah predicted that Cyrus would “rebuild” Jerusalem when at the time it had not yet been destroyed.

Note in the above text that Isaiah boldly predicted that God would use Cyrus to “subdue nations”, “strip kings of their armor” and “open doors before him so that gates will not be shut”.

As you recall, when Daniel read to King Belshazzar the handwriting on the wall, we are told that: **“That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain,” (Dan 5:30)**

Normally it would take months or years for an invading army to tear town massive walls like those surrounding Babylon. There was no need for the Medes and the Persians to tear down the walls, however, for God had ordained that the “door” of Babylon would be left open. Herodotus, the historian, confirms that the inner gates of Babylon facing the Euphrates River were carelessly left open on the night of Belshazzar’s banquet. Since the whole city was celebrating, the invading army pretended to be part of the revelry. This enabled them to go virtually unopposed to the royal palace and immediately kill proud King Belshazzar on “that very night”.

THE RIGHTEOUS LIVE BY FAITH

Jesus said: **“Things that cause people to sin are bound to come” (Lk. 17:1)**. Problems are inevitable. The righteous, however, do not focus on the problems, they focus on the future. They live by faith ! They are not harmed by the fiery darts of the wicked one because they are protected by a “shield of faith” (Eph. 6:16). There is a dramatic difference between those who “believe” God keeps His promises, and those who don’t.

Isaiah noted the same contrast that Habakkuk did:

“But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked." (Isa 57:20-21) From a distance the ocean may seem peaceful, but it is not. When you look closely you realize that the troubled sea is constantly churning up mire and mud. This is an accurate illustration of wicked people!

“but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isa 40:31)

The Bible is right! The unrighteous are “puffed up”, but the “righteous live by faith”. Like an eagle soaring, those who believe God rise above the storm.

NEW TESTAMENT APPLICATION

This quotation from Habakkuk about the righteous living by faith is found three times in the New Testament Scriptures.

I

TO THE ROMANS

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Rom 1:16-17).

It is thought that Paul dictated this letter to Rome from Corinth about A.D. 58. This is significant because only a few months before he had written some things to the Corinthians that would be very discouraging to people without faith. Here are just a few examples:

- **“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling” (1 Cor 2:3).**
- **“To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world” (1 Cor 4:11-13).**
- **“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death” (2 Cor 1:8-9).**
- **“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2 Cor 4:8-11)**
- **“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and**

thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches” (2 Cor 11:23-28).

Paul was not harmed by any of these hardships. He wrote to the Romans that since we have been justified by faith we can rejoice in suffering (Rom. 5:1 - 5). God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Suffering was not a surprise to Paul for at the time of his conversion he was told about **“how much he must suffer”** for the name of Christ (Acts 9:16). He passed on this warning to others and said: **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22)**. He even promised Timothy that **“Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12)**. Peter joined with Paul by reminding his readers: **“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” (1 Peter 4:12-13)** Note that Paul and Peter’s optimism in the midst of suffering involved the future. Their faithfulness in the midst of suffering is a powerful illustration of the power of the Gospel and what it means to live by faith!

The Kingdom Paul preached did not come with observation (Lk. 17:20). It was a spiritual kingdom! It focused on eternal treasures more than temporary rewards. Faith involves the future! The punishment of the wicked and the honoring of the righteous do not come immediately. The things we “see” are temporal, that’s why Paul focused on what is “unseen” (2 Cor. 4:18). Remember! The righteous live by faith! We are not only justified by faith in the present, we live by faith for the future. The righteousness of faith is from “first until last”! Faith is **“being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1)**.

II

TO THE GALATIANS

“Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Gal 3:11-12)

It seems that salvation by faith is never our first choice. It is only after we have exhausted every human effort that we become desperate enough to even consider faith as an option. Abram was 86 years old before he was justified by faith (Gen. 15:6). How many years of failure will you experience before you “believe God”?

Paul’s letter to the Galatians is his only letter containing no commendation for those who received it. Paul begins the letter by stating his apostolic credentials and then immediately berated the Galatians for perverting the gospel (Gal. 1:6 - 9). Note that not even an angel from heaven could escape punishment for such blasphemy. Their conduct was so irrational that Paul feared they had been “bewitched” (Gal. 3:1). The choosing of law over grace is not rational. The Law is not “good news”, but “grace” is! In reality, the Law written in stone is a covenant of death (2 Cor. 3:7).

3,000 died without mercy when the Law was given (Ex. 32:28). The Law was a “yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1). The teaching of Law was perpetrated by “false brothers” (Gal. 2:4). Those trying to be justified by law were severed from Christ and had fallen from grace (Gal.5 :4).

Yes! God gave the Law, but He did so for a purpose. It was like a severe teacher bringing us to Christ that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24). Remember, when the real “Good News” was preached, 3,000 were saved (Acts 2:41).

So the Galatians faced the same dilemma as the Jews did in the days of Habakkuk. It was also the same dilemma faced by the Romans when they received Paul’s letter. Do we believe God or not? The righteous do, and the “puffed up” do not!

III

TO THE HEBREWS

“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.’” (Heb 10:35-38)

The Hebrews at the time they received this letter were experiencing great hardship. There was a famine throughout the whole world (Acts 11:28), but it was particularly hard on the Hebrews. Remember, they had sold their houses and lands to feed the poor (Acts 4:34). As a result of their poverty, an appeal was made to gentile churches throughout the Roman world to send money (Gal. 2:10; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8, 9, Etc.)

The obedience of the gentiles to help the Jews was called by Paul a “confession of the gospel of Christ” (2 Cor. 9:13). God orchestrated it all to help break down the wall of separation between Jews and gentiles and make of the two, one new man, so making peace (Eph. 2:15).

Our text about the righteous living by faith sets the stage for Hebrews 11, which is called “The faith chapter of the Bible”. Virtually every example of faith in this great chapter involves believing God for the future. Remember! Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). Remember! The righteous walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

- Illustrative of the way faith involves the future are three great promises God made to Abram.
- God promised Abram that his descendants would become a great nation. He didn’t see that with human eyes, but he did see it by faith. Remember! The righteous live by faith!
 - God promised him the “Promised Land” (Gen. 13:14) but he didn’t get enough of it to put his foot on (Acts 7:5). Abram believed his descendants would inherit that land, however,

- and they did! This illustrates again how the righteous live by faith.
- God promised Abram that in his Seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. This was a prophecy about Jesus (Gal. 3:16) Jesus, of course, would not be born for almost 2,000 years. Yet, by faith, Abram saw Him! Jesus said: **“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56)**. This too also illustrates that the righteous live by faith!

ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

Someone has observed that the postponement of pleasure is the key to civilization. The savage eats the grain today, but the civilized plant the grain and patiently wait for the harvest.

The cross of Christ did not bring immediate pleasure, yet it was an integral part of God’s plan. Jesus enduring the cross, however, because of the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2). Jesus willingly endured pain in the present, because of the joy He would experience in the future.

The cross is not an option for us either. Jesus said: **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23)** The same principle about future reward applies! Those who follow Christ are willing to suffer temporal suffering to receive an eternal reward. They receive power in the present because of what they believe about the future. Paul knew the gospel was the “power of God” unto salvation. The righteous live by faith!

There were some in Philippi, however, that did not like this doctrine. Paul wrote: **“For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things” (Phil 3:18-19)**

These corrupt teachers were choosing temporal comfort over eternal reward. This is the exact opposite of what Christ taught. With tears in his eyes Paul wrote that “Their god was their stomach” and “their mind was on earthly things”.

Note the contrast: **“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil 3:20-21)**.

The true significance of the cross involves the future and is only seen by faith.

THE FOOL

The Psalmist said: **“The fool says in his heart ‘there is no God’” (Ps. 14:1)**. The “fool” lives only for today with no serious thought about eternity. How foolish!

One day a man came to Jesus concerned about his earthly inheritance, Jesus warned him: **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (Luke 12:15)**

Then Jesus expanded on this truth and told this parable: **“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' ” But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' ” This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:16-21)**

This parable illustrates our text in a very forceful way. This rich fool was proud and self absorbed. Without a thought of God or others he bragged about “my crops”, “my barns”, “my grain”, and “my goods”. His prosperity, no doubt, made him the envy of his neighbors.

He may have been the envy of his peers, but God called him a “fool”. That very night he died and he left all of “his” possessions to others.

He missed the mark by not understanding that the “righteous live by faith”.

THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGAR

Jesus told a similar story about the “rich man” and “Lazarus”. The fact that Lazarus is named leads to the assumption that this is an actual story and not a parable. Please consider:

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' ” No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' ” He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from

the dead.'" (Luke 16:19-31)

If you do not understand the significance of this story then you cannot grasp the meaning of the righteous living by faith.

On first glance virtually everyone would prefer to be the rich man rather than the beggar.

With eyes of faith, however, we see beyond our present suffering. When we live by faith we actually prefer to give up the things we cannot keep to gain the treasures we cannot lose.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

The "faith chapter" of the Bible mentions many heroes and heroines who "lived by faith". Everyone of them had to make the same choice that we also have to make.

ARE WE GOING TO LIVE BY FAITH OR NOT?

Some of the faithful saw their prayers answered on earth. They **"conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again"** (Heb 11:33-35)

"Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground" (Heb 11:35-38)

PLEASE DO NOT FORGET, HOWEVER:

"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Heb 11:39-40)

MOSES GAVE THE PEOPLE OF GOD A CHOICE

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Deut 30:19-20)

These people could have entered victoriously but they didn't. Do you know why? Their actions were not directed "by faith". They could have chosen faith, but they didn't. Please consider:

"For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith" (Heb 4:2)

CALEB AND JOSHUA DID HAVE FAITH

God promised His people that He would give them the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God promised: **"You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you" (Lev 26:7-8)**

Caleb and Joshua believed the promises of God, but the rest did not. Their actions were combined by faith. That's why they did enter in and the rest did not. Please consider:

"Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun" (Num 14:30)

DO YOU HAVE FAITH?

Please ponder this question from Joshua: **"But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Josh 24:15)**

CHOOSE CHRIST AND LIVE BY FAITH!

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:3-9).