

Sermon #28 — *Habakkuk Series*

Title: **THE GREATEST EVIL**
 AND
 THE GREATEST GIFT

Text: Habakkuk 2:4

Subject: *Pride and Faith*

Date: Tuesday Evening—May 10, 2011

Tape # *Habakkuk #28*

Readings: *Don Raneri and Joe Blakely*

Introduction:

The title of my message is **THE GREATEST EVIL AND THE GREATEST GIFT**. I want to talk to you about the greatest evil that exists in the world and the greatest, most enriching, most useful, most beneficial gift you can ever receive in this world. I realize that we often use words like “greatest” as expressions of overstatement, hyperbole, and exaggeration, but that is not the case as I use the word “greatest” in this message. I want to show you, and show you from the Book of God, **THE GREATEST EVIL AND THE GREATEST GIFT**, the greatest evil that exists in the world and the greatest, most enriching, most useful, most beneficial gift you can ever receive in this world.

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

Our text will be Habakkuk 2:4. In this one verse of Scripture God the Holy Spirit shows us the attitudes of all men and women with relation to God, the Gospel of His grace, and all things pertaining to righteousness and true godliness. — **Habakkuk 2:4.**

(Habakkuk 2:4) “Behold, his soul [which] is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

It is ever God’s purpose to put a division between Israel and Egypt, between those who fear the Lord and those who fear Him not. You and I cannot make that division; but God does. Any time we try to separate wheat from tares we’ll jerk up the wheat and keep the tares. Any time we try to separate the sheep from the goats we’ll put the sheep out and keep the goats. It is ours simply to cast out the Gospel net and drag in the fish God puts in our net. He will separate to good from the bad; but we do not have the ability to make that separation.

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

The Lord God is constantly separating Israel from Egypt. **Frequently, in times of trouble, the trials of providence become very searching tests of men.** Often those who looked like true believers when everything was smooth and bright give up their confidence in God when trial is hard and continues long. Trials reveal the patience of the saints and the impatience of mere professors of faith. By these things the Lord God often makes men see what they really are. That is one reason why troubles come upon both the righteous and the wicked: — that men's true character may be discovered, — that the secrets of their hearts may be revealed. By these things God often reveals the pride of one and the faith of another and thereby separates the precious from the vile. — **Thus it was in Habakkuk's day and thus it is today.**

(Habakkuk 2:4) “Behold, his soul [which] is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

As the Babylonian Captivity separated the proud, unbelieving, carnal Israelite from the broken, humbled, believing, spiritual Israelite, so the trials we experience in this world separate the proud professor of faith in Christ from the true possessor of faith in Christ. — **“The day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts”**

(Habakkuk 2:4) “Behold, his soul [which] is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

TWO GROUPS

*First, **I want to remind you that there are just two groups of people in this world:** the proud who are not upright before God and the just who live by faith in Christ, — elect and reprobate, — the just and the unjust, — those who are in the broad way that leads*

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

to destruction and those who are in the narrow way of life, — those who worship God and those who refuse to worship God. Notice how Habakkuk was inspired of God to distinguish between the two:

(Habakkuk 2:4) “Behold, his soul [which] is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

In every age all men and women respond to Christ, the message of His coming, His accomplishments, and His grace in these two ways, and only in these two ways.

THE PROUD are incredulous, mocking, unbelieving. They scoff and ridicule.

John Gill said, “The proud and haughty Scribes and Pharisees are here plainly described, whose minds were elated with themselves; whose hearts were like bubbles, blown up, full of wind; whose souls swelled with pride and vanity, and a high

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

conceit of themselves; of their merit and worth; of their holiness and works of righteousness; and treated those they thought below them in these things with the utmost disdain and contempt; and trusted in themselves, and to their own righteousness.”

Habakkuk declares that the unbelieving are “**lifted up**” with pride, lifted up in themselves. They are lifted up with their high opinion of themselves. That is what God says here in His word about you who refuse to trust Christ. — **You are lifted up with your high opinion of yourself!**

- Your Goodness
- Your Good Works
- Your knowledge
- Your Sacrifices
- Your Devotion
- Your Service

But, bless God, there is another group of people in this world. In every age and in every part of the

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

world God Almighty has His elect remnant. They are...

THE JUST who live by faith in Christ. God's elect are just before Him, living by faith in Christ, not by the works of the law, but by faith in the righteousness of Christ. We live before God through the righteousness of Christ which we received by the gift of faith in Him. It is not faith itself, or the act of believing, that is our justifying righteousness before God, but the righteousness of Christ we lay hold on by faith. Trusting Christ we live, both spiritually and eternally. Our faith does not give us life or create life. Our faith in Christ is the fruit and evidence of the life God has given.

THE GREATEST EVIL

Second, I want to remind you that pride is the greatest evil in the heart of man, the greatest evil in the world, and the root of all evil.

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

Of all the evils that reside in and arise from the human heart, pride is the most abominable. Pride is the ugliest monster that dwells in the dark den of our hearts. **Pride is the root of all sin.**

- It was pride that destroyed Lucifer.
- Pride led one third of the heavenly angels in rebellion against the throne of God.
- Pride inspired Adam to steal the fruit of God's tree.
- Pride brought the curse of God upon man, upon the beasts of the field, and upon the earth which God created.
- And pride made the first son of Adam a murderer.

Compared with pride all the other evil passions of our hearts are easy to control.

- A man may control his sensual lusts, otherwise all men would be rapists.
- He may control his covetousness, otherwise all would be thieves and murderers.

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

- He may even control his envy, otherwise we would all be at each other's throats all the time.
- But where is the man who can control his pride?

There is nothing we detest in others so much as pride. Yet, pride is the most persistent evil of our own hearts. And nothing could be more inconsistent than “*the pride of man.*”

As pride is the root of all sin, **pride is the root of all heresy** too. Men utter false doctrine because they are unwilling to bow to the revelation of God. Man thinks his own judgment, reason, or opinion is superior to the Word of God.

I once heard **Jimmy Swaggart** say, “God limited His omniscience and omnipotence, so that man could be free. God chose to limit himself rather than interfere with man's free-will.” What would make a man say such a thing? Pride! Pride is the root of Arminian free-willism.

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

The religion of this world, be it papacy or Protestantism, liberalism or conservatism, fundamentalism or atheism, is all one religion.

- Its doctrine is the dignity, the supremacy, and the goodness of man.
- It makes man his own teacher, his own ruler, his own savior, and his own god.

And man eats it up, because man is proud. He delights to hear that God is limited and he is free. Proud man delights in hearing that God's power, knowledge, grace, and wrath are all dependent upon him. I solemnly warn you: Beware of any doctrine that promotes human pride. "*Pride goeth before destruction.*"

Pride is the universal sin of human nature. David pride that the Lord God might hide him from "*the pride of man*" (Psalm 31:20). Pride is universal. Where is it not found? Hunt among the highest and loftiest in the world, and you will find it there. Then go and search among the poorest and the most miserable, and you will find it there. There is as

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

much pride inside a beggar's rags as in a prince's robe. The harlot is just as proud as a model of chastity.

Pride is a strange creature. It never objects to its lodgings. It will live comfortably enough in a palace and equally at its ease in a hut. It is perfectly at home in the brothel and in the temple. It lives just as well in the ghetto as it does in a mansion.

There is no man, woman, or child in whose heart pride does not live and rule by nature.

- Pride of Face!
- Pride of Place!
- Pride of Race!
- Pride of Grace!

Yes, even among God's elect, this great evil is present.

One is proud of his strength. Another of his knowledge. — One is proud of her natural beauty,

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

another of her purchased beauty. How foolish, how evil pride is!

Do you remember how the Holy Spirit holds up James and John to set before us a very great evil of pride? What an ungodly, disgusting, shameful, sinful, foolish thing pride is!

(Mark 10:35-41) “And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can...And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be much displeased with James and John.”

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

James and John were true believers. They were born of God. They truly loved the Lord Jesus Christ. But they were terribly ignorant of some very important, basic things, ignorant of some very basic Gospel truths. Their ignorance was overshadowed only by their pride. These two brothers asked the Lord to give them the place of pre-eminence in His Kingdom! **They presumed that they could personally suffer and endure all that the Lord Jesus would have to suffer and endure as the Lamb of God!** And **they sought a position of superiority over their brethren!**

Here are two of the Apostles of Christ seeking great things for themselves. **But we must not be too severe in our judgment of them. Their pride was only a fair representation of the pride of our own hearts.** It is the pride of our hearts that Mark 10 is intended to expose and check. Let me point out two or three things in these verses.

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

First, let us all learn this fact: — **Genuine believers are often ignorant of things which seem elementary to others.** Though our Lord plainly instructed them, though they were themselves chosen Apostles, James and John simply did not understand the spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom, or the necessity of His substitutionary sacrifice and sin-atonement. Mary Magdalene understood those things, but they did not, at least not at this time. They truly trusted Christ. They were men whose sins the Lord Jesus had forgiven, men into whose hands He had placed the keys of His Kingdom; but they had a lot, an awful lot to learn!

Many assert dogmatically that a person cannot be saved without a specific measure of doctrinal knowledge and understanding. The measure by which they make such judgments is always their own "knowledge and understanding." What arrogance! What foolishness! The issue is not *what* we know, but *Who*. Salvation is not in knowing doctrines and

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

facts. Salvation is knowing a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, we are again reminded here of the fact that **God's saints in this world are sinners still**. That includes you and me. We are a people with a vile, sinful, hellish, ungodly nature called "flesh"; and "*that which is born of the flesh is flesh!*" We are such wretched sinners that we must constantly watch over our souls and guard against pride, self-esteem, and self-confidence. These things are so deeply rooted and ingrained in us that we are seldom truly aware of their presence.

The other disciples were as guilty as James and John. They were displeased with James and John, not because they asked for this place of honor, but because they did not ask first. They were upset because James and John wanted to be exalted above them!

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

It is not at all unusual for those who truly have come out of the world, taken up the cross, forsaken all, and follow Christ to become envious, jealous, and offended if a brother or sister is promoted above them. We are so proud and fickle that we get our feelings hurt if someone mentions two or three names in public, but fails to mention ours! Such pride is horribly shameful. It causes strife and division. It ought not to be. But it certainly is not unusual.

The fact is, the greatest problem we face, the most dangerous enemy we have to deal with is our own stinking pride. Pride is the oldest of all sins, the most universal, and the most destructive. We all love power, pre-eminence, prestige, position, and property, because we are all terribly proud. It is our pride that causes us to crave attention and to become upset with those who get it instead of us.

Do you remember what I said to you at the beginning of my message?

- Pride inspired Lucifer's fall (Isaiah 14:12-14).

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

- Pride brought one third of the heavenly angels down to hell (Jude 6).
- Pride seduced Eve.
- Pride destroyed Adam.

And it is always pride that causes strife and division among the sons and daughters of Adam
(Psalm 10:2).

- What is it that divides, separates, and distinguishes men and women from one another according to race, rank, and riches? — Pride!
- What is it that divides brethren? — Pride!
- What is it that splits up families? — Pride!
- What is it that causes war? — Pride!

Yes, even among God's saints, our greatest problems, difficulties, injuries, and troubles are the result of pride. — **Thomas Hooker** once said, "Pride is a vice that cleaveth so fast unto the hearts of men that if we were to strip ourselves of all faults one

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

by one, we would undoubtedly find it the very last and hardest to put off.”

Of all those things named in the Bible which God hates, pride is number one (Proverbs 6.17). It is our pride that makes us weak and vulnerable to temptations. It is pride that keeps sinners from seeking the Lord. — **“The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek [after God]: God [is] not in all his thoughts”** (Psalm 10:4). Let us pray, day by day, that our God may deliver us from the pride of our hearts.

When our Lord asked James and John if they could endure the baptism He had to endure and drink the cup He had to drink, they did not hesitate to say, “*We can.*” **Did you ever notice in the Word of God that the recorded falls of God’s saints are usually at the very point where they were strongest, not at their weakest point, but at their strongest?**

- Look at **Job**. What man was ever so patient as Job? Yet, I know of none more impatient.

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

- **Moses** was the meekest of men. Yet, his rash anger kept him out of the Promised Land.
- **Samson** was the strongest man who ever lived. Yet, he was conquered by a woman.
- Saul never had a friend so loyal as **David**. Yet, David killed his friend Uriah.
- **Solomon** was the wisest of men; but he was also, undoubtedly, one of the most foolish.

My point is this: — We must never be so proud as to trust in our own strength. **God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness, not in our strength.** Therefore, Paul said, “*When I am weak, then am I strong*”. When we foolishly imagine in the pride of our hearts that we are strong, then we are most weak. When we think we are strong, we think we do not need Christ!

(1 Corinthians 4:7) “For who maketh thee to differ [from another]? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive [it], why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

received [it]?”

(2 Corinthians 4:7) “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

Without question, pride is the greatest evil in this world. God save me from my pride. — “**Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not up right in him!**” Nothing is more common than pride; and nothing is more unreasonable!

(1 Corinthians 4:7) “For who maketh thee to differ [from another]? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive [it], why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received [it]?”

- The proud man’s soul is not upright in him.
- The proud man, the one who is lifted up by his high opinion of himself, will never seek light. — (The Hindu and the Microscope).

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

- The proud man, the one whose soul is lifted up, will eventually draw back from Christ.

THE GREATEST GIFT

Third, I want you to see that faith in Christ is the greatest, most enriching, most beneficial of all gifts in this world.

(Habakkuk 2:4) “Behold, his soul [which] is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

O gift of gifts! O grace of faith!
My God, how can it be
That Thou, Who hast discerning love
Shouldst give that gift to me?

Ah, grace, unto unlikeliest hearts
It is thy boast to come;
The glory of thy light to find
In darkest spots a home.

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!”

When I speak of faith be sure you understand me. I am talking about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. —

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

There are sitting before me men and women who are upright in heart, honest in tongue, careful in hand, and obedient in walk. You who live by faith are just before God. Understand **FOUR THINGS** here, and I’ll be done.

First, faith is the gift of God. Faith is not natural to man. Faith is not a product of man’s will. And faith is not something one man communicates to or gives to another. Faith is the gift, work, and operation of God’s omnipotent saving grace.

(Ephesians 1:13-20) “In whom ye also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

“15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, 16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; 17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: 18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, 19 And what [is] the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set [him] at his own right hand in the heavenly [places].”

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

(Ephesians 2:8-9) “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

(Philippians 1:29) “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.”

(Colossians 2:12) “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with [him] through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

Second, all who trust the Lord Jesus Christ are just before God and upright in their souls before Him. Faith in Christ receives free, complete justification from Christ. — Believers live upon the righteousness of Christ! — We live upon the merit of His blood, “*being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus!*”

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

Not only is that so; but all who trust the Lord Jesus, all who have experienced God's free saving grace in Christ, all who are born of God are upright before God, their souls are upright in them, being sanctified by His grace (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:22-24; Ephesians 4:21-22; 1 John 3:5-9).

Third, those who trust Christ, all of them, each of them, live “by his faith.”

(Habakkuk 2:4) “Behold, his soul [which] is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

(Galatians 2:20) “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

It is not the man who is great in his own sight that is great in the sight of God; but it is he that is broken and contrite, little and weak and trembling, and yet who believes in the Lord Jesus, and casts himself upon the great love, mercy, and grace of God in Christ, who lives and shall live forever!

Fourth, this gift of faith is the greatest of all gifts because this is the most beneficial and most enriching gift there is. — ““*Blessing I will bless thee!*

- Faith receives all grace.
- Faith makes us useful and serviceable to one another.
- Faith receives all the glory and blessedness of heaven.
- Faith unites us to Christ.
- Faith gives us Christ and all things in Him and with Him!

May God the Holy Spirit be pleased to grant this great gift of life and faith in Christ to you.

THE GREATEST EVIL
AND
THE GREATEST GIFT

Amen!