

I Will Exult in the Lord!

A Journey through the Burden of Habakkuk

1 Introduction to the Book of the Prophet Habakkuk

Church September 19, 2021

Habakkuk 1:1

The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.

To the Glory of God

During the years of 1646 and 1647, God moved upon a group of very earnest and sincere born- again believers to write down what has come to be known as the “*Westminster Catechism*.” And this Catechism is 107 Questions and Answers about the Fundamentals of the Christian Faith. And the very first Question asks:

What is the chief End of Man?

... and the Answer is,

Man’s chief End is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

And so, back in the 17th Century- those who led the Church of Jesus understood something that I think has been largely lost to far too many in the 21st Century Church: that Salvation is NOT merely about sinful and unworthy sinners escaping Hell and going to Heaven when we die (even though that is wonderful). But Salvation is *primarily* about the *exaltation* of God; AND about unworthy sinners, being radically changed by what God alone does for them- so that they find the *fullness* of their *own* Joy- in God being glorified.

So, the men, who led the Church nearly 400 years ago knew that BOTH of those two things were taught in Scripture; and that BOTH of them were EQUALLY important. So much so, that without BOTH of them being accomplished- neither one actually was. In other words, God is NOT really being exalted by me- and I’m NOT really “serving Him”; nor am I actually obeying the Bible- UNLESS I am able to find the fullness of my own JOY- in God being glorified.

And when you comprehend this- things like, “*striving to obey the Bible*”; or “*serving God*”; or “*worshipping the Lord*”; or “*following Jesus*”

are taken completely out of the realms of “*Humanly initiated Duty and Obligation*” and they become the Foundation of our own Delight in Jesus. In other words, Obeying God is no longer something I’m merely, “*supposed to do.*” or something done- “*because it’s the right thing to do*”. But striving to submit myself to the Authority of Scripture actually becomes the pathway to the fullness of my own Joy.

Because when we say that we serve God because it is, “*the right thing to do*”; or something that we are, “*supposed to do*” we rob ourselves of the very Motivation that God the Holy Spirit put into the Bible for us. Now look, striving to obey God IS the “right thing to do”- but when we look at that way- all we have left to motivate us is the notion that we serve God because “*we are just that Good*” or because, “*our love for God is just that powerful*” or that, “*we have such control and discipline over our lives that we can force ourselves to obey God.*” Yet all that does- is to draw attention to *ourselves* to show the world how really great *we* are. And I would suggest that that is the *worst* of all reasons we could possibly give as to why we want to obey God.

Over and over the sacred Scriptures tell us that the reason God did things was,

Ephesians 2:9b

... so that no one may boast.

... but when we strive to follow Jesus or obey the Bible for any other Reason other than to find the fullness of our own Joy in God being glorified- we are boasting louder than anyone else.

So, even though some of you may think you are a Stoic¹- please hear me when I tell you that God has “*hard-wired*” your mind and heart and the very core of your being with the desire to be happy. And it is a God-given Desire that is Good; and Right; and Lovely; and True; and Beautiful- as long as you seek to be happy- in Him!

And we are to pursue being “*Happy in God*”- with every fiber of our being- because it is both Sacred and Beneficial. Not to mention being happy makes you very... happy! So, I really think being happy is a good thing. And so does God. Because God is the happiest Being in the Universe.

A 17th Century French mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), actually captured this Truth in one of the most poignant paragraphs in history:

¹ A Stoic is a person who thinks that the height of true spirituality is the elimination of all human Emotion

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.”²

So, while some seek Happiness with pills or television programs; others seek it with sex or spending. Some seek Happiness in thinking they are being selfless to others; while still others pursue Happiness in a bottle. But however they seek it- ALL people want to be happy. It is *in us*- and there is nothing *worse* than not finding it.

Isn't it marvelous to know that the Owner and Creator of the Universe wants you to be happy, too? But instead of trivial, surface, temporary and very, very fragile Happiness- God wants your Joy to be FULL! In **John 17:13b**, Jesus said,

... these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

And when I discovered this Truth- my own life was *radically* altered- forever. Because for many years, I looked at my own Desire to be happy and God's Desire to be glorified as being *mutually* exclusive. In other words, Salvation was about me- putting my inherent Desire to be happy on hold- so that I could spend all my time- trying to glorify God. I thought that being saved meant that I was supposed to *sacrifice* my craving for Joy on the Altar of the Glory of God.

In other words, I thought “serving God” was all about what I could do for God- *regardless* of whether that made me happy or not. So, after being saved for several decades- I finally realized that my desire to be happy and God's Desire to be glorified were NOT at odds with each other. In fact, it was God, Who put that Desire in me. The only thing the Bible condemns- is me striving to be happy in what does NOT glorify God. Other than that- the Bible actually *commands* me to be happy- in Him. In fact, God has promised *horrific* Punishment to those who find Joy in anyone or anything else- BESIDES God.

Christians, who have had ALL of their Sins forgiven and who are going to spend all of Eternity in unspeakable Pleasures- should be the happiest people on earth! God's Wrath is forever turned from them! All that God does with them and for them and to them- is ultimately Good!

So, being the kind of Man I am- I began to tinker with the first

² *Pensées*, Loc. 2049

Answer in the Westminster Catechism until I came up with this:

What is the chief End of Man?

Man's chief End is to glorify God BY enjoying Him forever.

God means for you and me to seek after the highest Happiness there is to experience. The Bible teaches this- *repeatedly and clearly*- even though most people in the modern Church have never heard this before; and even though most Leaders have never taught it. But *most* all of the great saints of Church History- who we like to quote all the time- *passionately* believed it and taught it *explicitly*.

Now one of the reasons for this disconnect is simply a phenomena of Language. Because whether we know this or not and whether we believe this or not- Language is *constantly* evolving. New words are *continually* being introduced; and old words, once commonly used, drop out altogether. And some words, still in use after hundreds of years, now mean something very different than they once did- like the English words, “Gay” or even “Happiness.”

Fifty years ago, no one would have dreamed that being “Gay” had anything to do with being sexually perverted. And while the concept of “Happiness” covers a very broad range of human Experiences in general- for many contemporary English-speakers- *particularly* Christians- the concept of “Happiness” has radically *narrowed*. Most people in the English speaking, material driven world- consider “Happiness” to be a temporary, transient, even trivial kind of Pleasure, usually derived from *external* Circumstances. And they reserve the term, “Joy” for deeper, more substantial; more serious, and more durable Pleasures.

So, while “Happiness” would be relegated in 21st Century America to things like pizza and ice cream and having different colored crayons- “Joy” would fit in with more *profound* things- like God's Salvation- which is why David wrote this in **Psalm 51:12:**

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation...

But making such a distinction between “Happiness” and “Joy” would have greatly confused the believers, who worshipped God here on earth a few centuries ago.

And to prove my point- please call to mind the Document that got our nation started- the “*Declaration of Independence*”. There, Thomas Jefferson asserted that all people are,

“... endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of ... *HAPPINESS.*”

For Jefferson, “*Happiness*” was something more profound than the pursuit of the Pleasures of pizza and crayons. God had put a dream in this man’s heart and mind of a Nation- where people would be free to devote their lives to diligently pursue what they believed would bring them the *deepest; widest; and most durable* Pleasures possible here on earth.

But somewhere along the way- in response to the lure of 52” TV’s and cars that can park themselves- we left off pursuing “*Happiness*” and we began pursuing stuff that doesn’t make anyone Happy. And even in Church, I am sorely afraid that, in the name of being so busy trying to be “*Holy*”- we may have forgotten how to be “*Happy*”.

Just a few decades before Jefferson penned down his “*Declaration*” to the King of England- God gave Jonathan Edwards an infinitely *deeper* and far more *durable* Vision of Pleasure- and he wrote,

“Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can, with all the power; might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.”

I can only image how long it has been for most of you to know that God had impressed on somebody a Vision for true, biblical Happiness- that so consumed him- that he sought to pursue it with... VIOLENCE!

So, it is the Tragedy of our Times that so many people are *unhappy*. And while I completely understand why lost and unsaved people are unhappy- what is utter blasphemy- is that so many people, who claim to be saved- are also unhappy. Why is that? How could that possibly be?

Well, the Prophet Habakkuk was also very Unhappy. Around 600 years before Jesus was born- this Prophet’s Unhappiness stemmed from the fact that he thought that God had *abandoned* him. Habakkuk thought that God wasn’t listening to his Prayers; and that God was purposefully ignoring him. And that made him very unhappy.

This Prophet looked out and he saw Lying and Thievery in the Land that God had given to His people. He saw Injustice and Crime. He saw the chosen sons and daughters of Abraham worshipping idols- and this Prophet cried out to God- and yet, NOTHING happened! God didn’t move to stop it and things kept getting worse and worse!

So, this Prophet thought what many of us have thought- that God didn’t care about things like Purity and Righteousness and Sin and Holiness. I mean why else would God allow these things to go on and on and on and not stop it?

But the Reality is that God cares a lot about all these things. And God cares a whole lot MORE about stopping Evil than Habakkuk cared... or you... or me. God *hates* Evil. And He has done MORE to stop Evil than anyone else. Some of us have paid a Price in our Fight against Sin and Evil. But God took the Treasure of Heaven- the One He loved the MOST- and God poured out the full Fury of His Wrath against Evil and Sin on Jesus- as He was screaming in Agony on the Cross! So, whatever Price any of us have paid- pales in comparison to what God has already done! So, nobody has even come close to do as much against Evil as God has. And the Reality is that God ALWAYS stops Evil. ALWAYS. Evil NEVER wins. Sin is ALWAYS judged by God and NOBODY, who sins gets away with it.

Yet, God does not always stop Evil in our timing; or in the manner in which we might want Him to. There are occasions when Evil seems to flourish; and times when Evil people seem to prosper. And this is historic. For example, about 400 years before Habakkuk was born- the wisest man in the world at that time wrote this in **Proverbs 24:19**:

Do not fret because of evildoers Or be envious of the wicked;

Now the word, English word, “fret” comes from a Hebrew word (*charah*; Strong’s # 2734) that means: *to be hot; or to burn; to become angry; frustrated; or jealous*. So, why did Solomon instruct us to NOT burn with the anger of Frustration or Jealousy over those who do Evil? Because godly people were doing that! Habakkuk did that. And there are times that we burn in that very same Frustration and Anger. And we burn in two different ways:

1. We burn with anger AGAINST Evildoers; and we want God to judge them- right now
2. We burn with Frustration because it seems as though Evildoers get away with it

So, godly people “burn” hot AGAINST the Evil-doers in the sense that they are frustrated that God doesn’t seem to stop them. In other words, godly people see Evil-doers commit acts of Evil and *seemingly* get away with it- while the godly are struggling to do right- with *seemingly* no Rewards. But what did Solomon say would be the End of those who do Evil?

Proverbs 24:20

For there will be no future for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

... and in **Psalm 91:8** God promises that the Righteous will see the horrendous “**recompense of the wicked**” with their eyes- as God damns them- yet the Righteous will be safe in the Arms of a loving and merciful Savior.

So, the Reality is that Evil-doers NEVER get away with anything. All Sin will be adjudicated- either on the Cross in Salvation; or in Hell in eternal Damnation- and there will be NO outstanding Accounts. But God has His Own Way of dealing with each person. *Some* Evil-doers are judged *instantly* (**The Acts 12:23**)- while others are allowed to go on sinning for many, many years- seemingly, with no Repercussions. Yet the Bible is crystal clear about them:

Romans 2:5&6

5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

6 who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:

... so, God will finally judge all Evil when He comes back. Because the Reason that the world Jesus will create when He returns will be so Wonderful- is because Jesus will sovereignly remove all Evil from it. But the Way that God will remove all Evil- is by removing ALL unrepentant Evil-doers from the earth.

But one of the reasons God does not always instantly judge Evil-doers- is because *some* of them are going to be saved! We need to remember that all of us were wicked Evil-doers at one time. But instead of damning us (which He certainly *could* have)- God chose to show us Kindness. And the Apostle Paul said in **Romans 2:4** that it was this demonstration by God of His undeserved Kindness that brought us to Salvation.

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

So, what was *really* happening here was that Habakkuk was being confronted with the Nature and Character of God. But this Prophet was also being confronted with his *own* Nature as well. Because in spite of the fact that Habakkuk was crying out to God to judge and damn the Evil that was all around him- this Prophet had forgotten that he was Evil, too. Habakkuk’s doubting of God and even his assuming that God didn’t care- was as wicked and as sinful as a person can get. And yet, God had graciously chosen to set His Love upon him. And so, Habakkuk was a recipient of God’s Grace and Mercy- due to NO effort of his own.

And God has set His Love upon us, too. And we, too are recipients of God’s Grace and Mercy. And we see Evil all around us, too. And we cry out to God for

Him to stop it all; and end it all; and to judge it all; and damn it all- just like Habakkuk did.

But aren't we glad that God didn't judge and damn all the Evil *before* we were saved? Because if He had- which He certainly *could* have- then we would have been caught up in that furious Whirlwind of Wrath and Damnation rather than experience the tender and merciful Embrace of God through our Savior, Jesus!

And so, like Habakkuk, we spend most of our time- NOT *worshipping* God- but in *criticizing* Him; and in *critiquing* Him; and in *telling* Him *what* to do; and *when* to do it; and even *how* to do it- as though God needed Instructions from us about how to deal with the dark Evil that lives inside of human hearts.

What confused Habakkuk and what confuses us- is that we look at God; and *what* God does; and *why* God does it; and *how* God does it- through our own human Logic. Yet, in **Numbers 23:19a** God has already told us:

God is not a man...

... and in **Isaiah 55:8&9**

8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.

9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

... and so, we *wrongly* conclude that the Bible is primarily about *us*. Yet when God the Holy Spirit moved on Moses to write the very first few words of inspired and infallible Scripture- he said,

In the beginning God... (Genesis 1:1a)

... and the last two verses of sacred Writ says,

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. (The Revelation 22:20&21)

... so, the Bible begins and ends with God- NOT us.

And that means that what God does- is only confusing to us because we seek for God to act and to think and speak and operate the way we do. And when God has the audacity to act and think and operate like He alone owns everything- up to

and including us- the first thing we can think of to do- is to question God's Commitment against Evil?

And this is why I say it is *easy* to blaspheme God. We do it all the time. We doubt His Love; we critique His Logic; and we criticize His Actions. And this is not *some* people who do this- *some* of the time.

This is the PRIMARY way that human beings operate- for the MAJORITY of the time we live on earth. And that is true- even if we are saved. Every time God steps out of line with our puny; frail; finite; and fallen logic- and does what seems BEST to Him- we turn on Him faster than we can shake a stick. What is *rare*; what is very, very *uncommon*; and what takes a sovereign Act of God to *accomplish*- is to so utterly change us (by what God alone does for us) that we would *love* God; and *worship* God; and *trust* God- even when we don't *understand* God. And that is what Faith is all about. And that is why this Prophet's Book is in the Bible.

Habakkuk didn't understand two things that I pray that we will understand by the time we are through with this Book:

1. God's Ways are *Mysterious* to us
2. God's Ways are *Misunderstood* by us

1. God's Ways are Mysterious to us

Now we know very little about the man, whose name heads this Book- so, this Book is one of the most mysterious in the Bible. Twice, Habakkuk is called, "**the Prophet**" (1:1 & 3:1). But we don't know who his parents were; what city he came from; or what his background was. And these are the things that really mattered back in the ancient world. And yet, in God's Providence- all of that has been forever lost to us.

Even the man's name is a mystery to us. In the "*Masoretic Text*"³, his name is recorded as either "*Havaqquq*" or "*Hābāqqûq*". The original Hebrew of his name is: חַבַּקּוּק. Yet, outside of the title of this Book- this Prophet's name does not occur anywhere else in the Bible. The "*Septuagint*"⁴ transcribes this Prophet's name as "*Ἀμβακοῦμ*" (*Ambakoum*)

*while the "Latin Vulgate"*⁵ transcribed his name as "*Abacuc*".

³ The **Masoretic Text** is the authoritative Hebrew text used by Rabbis today. It is also the basis of the Old Testament verses used in Protestant Bibles

⁴ The **Septuagint** is the Greek version of the Old Testament. This is the version of the Scriptures that Jesus and all of His Disciples and Apostles used.

And so, this Book is a Mystery to us. Because this Book is NOT primarily a Book of Prophecy. The **Book of Habakkuk** is *primarily* about the Struggle that this man had with God- concerning why God seems to allow Wickedness to thrive. So, this Book is about a human being- called and chosen by God- going from great and disturbing Doubt- to great and powerful Faith.

Now part of the Reason we stumble over the Ways of God- is because we look at all of Life with eyes that are “Man-centered”. And “Man-centeredness” is about us looking at Life and even God and Scripture with *ourselves* at the very Center of it all. In other words, whatever we like- we as being “Good” and whatever we don’t like- is “Bad”. Whatever benefits us- at that moment- MUST be God’s Will; and whatever does not benefit us- at that moment- could not possibly be God’s Will. And, many times, this “Man-centered” Way of thinking spills over even when we read the Bible.

And that is when we really run into Problems. Because this Life is filled with amazing Joys and things that are absolutely Wonderful and Beautiful. But this world is broken. This world is filled with Sin and Rebellion against God. And the world System, by which the world operates- is dominated by satan. And so, this world is also filled with Injustice and Disease and Unfairness and Troubles- many, many, many Troubles.

And we are born into Sin; and we are shaped in Iniquity. And we are part of the Earth- earthy. And yet, we are also redeemed. And God desires more than anything else to fill us with the fullness of Joy, through Salvation in His Son, Jesus. But in order to do that- God MUST change us. Why? Because we are NOT already capable of handling the Joy that God has for us. And so, in order to bring to us the fullness of Joy; the very *height* of Happiness- God MUST change us.

And the Way- the ONLY Way for us to change- is “by Fire”. We MUST be purged and cleansed and purified. And that is done- *finally and forever*- by Faith in Jesus and in His finished Work.

“Okay, Brother Blair, we are purged and cleansed and purified by hoping and trusting in Jesus and in His finished Work. So why all the Trials AFTER we are saved?”

Trials don’t do what Jesus didn’t already do. We can’t improve on *anything* Jesus did for us- because what Jesus did was Perfect and Full. But what IS lacking; and what is NOT Perfect and Full- is our Faith and our Hope IN Jesus; and IN what Jesus has already done. And that is why ALL Trials are called a “*Trial of our Faith*”. So, we believe- yes. But, many times, our Faith is paper-

⁵ The **Latin Vulgate** is a 4th Century translation of the Bible authored largely by Jerome, which became the official Latin Bible at the **Council of Trent** (1545-1563). For well over 1,000 years- the Latin Vulgate was the most commonly used version of the Bible- thus was the Foundation of most of the Work of the Church during that time.

thin. We love God- but our love is not deep or wide or full. So, all of our Trials; and Sufferings; and our going through the Fire and being purged and made white- is to strengthen our Faith in God; and deepen our Love for God; and empower of Hope in God; and enable our Trust of God- so that our Joy in God will be made Full!

And this is Why the Scriptures teach us that God is radically “God-centered”. Because ONLY by us being changed- so that we find the fullness of our Joy in Him- can we truly be happy! And God knows that. And that is why it is *imperative* that God does ONLY that which brings *Himself* Glory! Because by God ONLY doing whatever makes His Name to be honored and praised and worshipped and loved and feared and adored- can we find the fullness of our Joy in Him!

And that involves *everything* God does- from Creation to Salvation. For example, God *created* us...

Isaiah 43:7b
... for My Glory ...

... and God *saves* us for...

Ephesians 1:6a
... the praise of the glory of His grace ...

So, God’s primary Goal in all that He does- is for us to...

... *glorify God BY enjoying Him forever*

So, it isn’t *primarily* about God getting us out of the Problems we are in. It isn’t *primarily* about God healing our sick bodies; or blessing us financially; or giving us more material Goods; or letting us accomplish all that is in our hearts. In ALL that God says; and in ALL that God does; and in ALL that God allows or causes to come into our lives- God wants us to KNOW Him; and LOVE Him and ENJOY Him- forever! Why? Because God and God ALONE is the Fountain of living Waters and the ONLY Source of infinite Pleasures! And this is why in **Psalm 16:11**- David said,

In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

... and God loves us so much- He doesn’t want us to miss any of that.

And so, God “allows” and “causes” certain things to come into our lives. He pulls things *towards* us; while pushing other things *away* from us. He raises up and He casts down- for one reason: So that we will KNOW and LOVE and ENJOY- Him!

And yet, the Way that God does this- is very Mysterious to us. Many times, we can't see what God is doing and so, out of either Fear or Unbelief or both- our first Response is to either turn on God; or to turn *away* from Him.

2. God's Ways are Misunderstood by us

For example, in 1st Century Israel- the Jews were eagerly looking for the Messiah. But Who this Messiah would be; and what He would do when he got here- was unclear to them. They *misunderstood* what the Old Testament Scriptures said and what they meant. And because the average Jew of that day was entirely “Man-centered” in their thinking- they naturally assumed several core things:

- The Messiah would *favor* the Jew and *commend* them for their Jewishness
- The Messiah would *hate* the pagan Roman occupiers
- The Messiah would HAVE to be a military Leader, who would *physically* vanquish the infidels
- The Messiah would restore Jewish superiority and rule the world from Jerusalem

The Jews knew that God had chosen them, “above all the peoples of the world”. But instead of making them Humble- this Knowledge made them Proud and Self-righteous. And in their sinful, Man-centered Arrogance- they *assumed* that the Messiah would hate the pagan Romans as much as they did. So, in **Matthew 5:38-48**, when the incarnate God told them,

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'

39 But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

40 If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.

41 Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'

44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

... they misunderstood. And so, they rejected Jesus out of hand as an imposter and a “son of Belial” (the devil).

The Jews knew that Abraham was their Father. But instead of making them Humble- this Knowledge made them Proud and Self-righteous. And in their sinful, Man-centered Arrogance- they *assumed* that the Messiah would commend them for their ethnic Jewishness. So, in **John 3:5b&6; 14-16-** when Jesus said,

5 ... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

14 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

... they misunderstood. And so, they rejected Jesus out of hand as an imposter and a “son of Belial” (the devil).

The Jews knew that God had chosen Jerusalem. And they knew that God had told Moses to establish a Priesthood with the children of Levi, who would sacrifice animals in the Temple in Jerusalem. But instead of making them Humble- this Knowledge made them Proud and Self-righteous. And in their sinful, Man-centered Arrogance- they *assumed* that the Messiah would commend them for “holding on” to the inferior Old Covenant- even when the Mediator of the infinitely superior New Covenant stood before them. And so, in **Matthew 24:1,** when Jesus said,

Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.

... they misunderstood. And so, they rejected Jesus out of hand as an imposter and a “son of Belial” (the devil).

The point I am making is that it wasn't because they doubted His Miracles; or because of any personal Sin they could find in Him that led to the overwhelming majority of 1st Century Jews to reject Jesus as the Messiah. It was the fact that their sinful, Arrogant “Man-centered” approach to all of Life- including their Knowledge of God- caused them to misunderstand EVERYTHING! And so, they did not KNOW; LOVE; or ENJOY God – when He was standing right in front of them!

So, the real Problem is NOT that we want to be Happy. No, God *commands* us to be Happy! No, the real Problem is that, because we are fallen- we settle for shiny trinkets and cheap plastic toys to make us Happy- while the Creator of infinite JOY stands before us with His Arms stretched wide. In other words- our inherent Humanness blinds us to what true Joy really is. And our intrinsic Finiteness makes us unaware that God wants us to be Happy infinitely MORE than we want to be Happy. The difference is that God understands that Sin will NEVER produce the Joy and Happiness we crave.

Now all throughout Human History- God has sovereignly allowed various “*Problems*” to rise up- which *dominate* the Era in which various believers live. And God uses these “*Problems*” to do at least two things:

1. To re-affirm the Absolute Truth of the Bible
2. To prove our Love for God

So, as a result of these “*Problems*” we have an Opportunity to stand faithful for the Word of God- or we can reach the Conclusion that the Bible is wrong; and we can discard it and buy into whatever “*Problem*” is the current rage. And many believers; and churches; and even entire Denominations do just that.

Because these “*Problems*” present us with difficult Concepts to have to deal with. They challenge what we have been taught. They stretch us beyond where we would like to go. And, many times, we don't have quick, or ready Answers to the Questions that these “*Problems*” present to us. And so, many times, God's people just stand there- silently- amazed at what God has allowed. And this is what was going on with Habakkuk.

For example, during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries- there was the “*Problem of Science*” that confronted the Church. Charles Darwin was allowed by God to put forth his thesis concerning the “*Origins of Life*”. And this was the birth of the concept that human beings *evolved* from one-celled amoebas.

And while many, many believers stood faithful to what God infallibly

revealed in the **Book of Genesis** about Creation- some, who lay claim to be saved, capitulated and bowed their knees to the un-scientific and patently anti-intellectual concept of Evolution. And that “Problem” plagues the Church to this day.

And so, many people in the modern Church feel the need to try to “blend” what the Bible says with what Science seemingly says. But these efforts almost, *universally* cause them to compromise very serious and important Concepts that the Bible teaches- or throw the Bible out altogether. All in the name of the supposed “infallibility” of so-called” Science”.

Today, any adherence to what the Bible clearly teaches about Creation is routinely mocked and belittled. And there have been speeches made on the floor of the US House of Representatives that people, who believe what the Bible teaches about Creation should never be allowed to run for Office; or have driver’s licenses; or be able to vote; or have access to banks; and they should not be allowed to own a business.

Soon after the “*Problem of Science*” reared its ugly head, the Church was confronted with the “*Problem of Prosperity*”. The “*Industrial Revolution*” created Prosperity that had never been imagined before. And many professing believers threw the biblical Warnings about Money and Wealth to the wind- as they bought into the pagan notion of “*Dialectic Materialism*”. Yet many remained faithful- even though this “*Problem*” plagues us to this day.

And all of this Science and Prosperity brought us to the early and mid 20th Century- where the Church was confronted with the “*Problem of Evil*”- as two world wars consumed Europe. And, along with the planned and systematic annihilation of 6 million Jews- Death and Destruction like no one had ever imagined occurred. Not counting the two nuclear explosions in Japan- upwards of 100 million human beings, on three Continents, perished during those years.

And believers during those years were staggard at the unimaginable demonstration of Evil and the frightening loss of life. “*Where is God in all of this?*” they asked. And along with the rise of godless Communism- it really looked like the United States as well as Christianity itself was on its last legs. And this “*Problem*” plagues us to this day.

In our day- the Church of Jesus is now confronted with the “*Problem of Human Sexuality*” along with the “*Problem of Technology*”. Our nation is producing a new billionaire every single week- *primarily* through new and exciting Technology- that to some, has replaced God as the Source of all of Life. And most, if not all of these “Tech-billionaires” are wholly godless; and even *hostile* to the concept of an all-wise and all knowing and all-powerful God.

Today- pagan entities, made powerful through Technology, are financing the radical transformation of our entire Civilization- with little or no admiration for the idea that God created them Male and Female- on Purpose- with unique, God-

ordained Roles. And so, strange and sinful sexual Perversions are becoming normalized- and to many- the Church is becoming entirely irrelevant.

And sadly, many old and venerable Denominations that were born during the heady days of the Reformation are capitulating to these unbiblical sexual imaginations as though God has been silent about them. And while they will not and cannot change what the Bible says about these Issues- it is making it infinitely harder for those who are determined to remain faithful to Scripture.

So, our Duty and our Privilege as the modern heirs of the Divine Truth of sacred Writ- is to be rock- solid about what the Bible clearly reveals about these Issues and to NEVER be quiet or ashamed- as we obey what God spoke through the Prophet in **Isaiah 58:1**:

Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression And to the house of Jacob their sins.

But 600 years before Jesus was born- the Prophet Habakkuk was confronted with the “*Problem of History*”. Israel was God’s “Promised Land”. And the Jews were God’s “chosen people”. God chose them to be His Own- to shower them with His Love and Favor and Mercy. And God Himself gave these people their land; and their language; and their Government; and their Culture; and their Religion.

But what happens when God’s people reject God? What happens when the people, to whom God gave His Name- cast that holy Name on the ground and walk on it? What happens when the very people, who were chosen to worship God- begin to worship wooden statues?

Well, normally, God sent them His Prophets- to bring Divine Indictments against them and call them to Repentance. Normally, God would hold back the rain; or refuse to bless their crops; or withhold the birth of children.

But as Habakkuk cried unto God about the Sins of his own people- this time it seemed that the Heavens were brass; and that God either didn’t hear or He was refusing to answer. In **Habakkuk 1:2-4** the Prophet prayed,

2 How long, O Lord, will I call for help, And You will not hear? I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save.

3 Why do You make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises.

4 Therefore the law is ignored And justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out perverted.

... but this time God did a new thing. And God finally did reply to His Prophet and said,

Habakkuk 1:5&6a

5 “Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days— You would not believe if you were told.

6 “For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans ...

“What? The Chaldeans? Lord, You are completely Righteous and Holy. And You say You are going to raise up a pagan and brutal people to come and prevail over Your Own chosen people? Why would you do that? Why would You use Evil to resolve the Sin of Your people? That just doesn’t make any sense!”
And Habakkuk was stunned. And in his utter despair- God the Holy Spirit “moved” him to write this Book.

The **Book of Habakkuk** is unique among all the prophetic Books of the Bible. Instead of this Book being a collection of various Prophecies about what God was going to do in the future- this Book is about God dealing with this one man- the Prophet Habakkuk- to teach him about himself; and about the God he worshipped. This Book shows us the struggle of a single man- as he is astonished at the God he thought he understood. It is about Habakkuk’s Misery and Confusion at how God exercises His Providence. And this Book is about Habakkuk’s journey- beginning with the pain of his Disillusionment at why God seemingly refused to hear his Prayers; and then through his utter Amazement at how God chose to act; all the way to Habakkuk finding his Joy in God being glorified!

This Book teaches us that God’s Ways are very Mysterious to us. And it also teaches us that, when God does move- many times- the Way God moves- is often misunderstood by us.

This Book teaches us that God moves in the Silence and in the Darkness and in the Pain and in the Disappointment. This Book teaches us that, while we are complaining about how God is not listening to us- God is very, very busy- answering our cries- in Ways that will astound us. And this Book teaches us that, God is infinitely MORE interested in redeeming us than He is in judging us.

Christian friends, God wants us to be happier than we can even imagine. But the Path to the fullness of Joy- is, many times, paved with tears and agony. But why is that? Is it because God is sadistic and just loves to torment us? No, it is because we are vile; and unbelieving; and untrusting; and selfish. And God could just annihilate us all- right now. But instead, God has chosen to love us and to put us in a place where we have to “hold our tongue and stand still”- so we may see the Salvation of the Lord!

Habakkuk thought God didn't hear him. He thought God didn't care. He thought God was mean and had forgotten him and was actually fighting *against* him. But as the mysterious and misunderstood Ways of God unfolded before him- Habakkuk could finally say,

Habakkuk 3:17&18

**17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls,**

18 Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

And if you and I could just go with Habakkuk- through our *own* Disillusionment; through our own Pain and Agony; through our own Battle with Disbelief; and the seeming Unfairness of it all- the God, Who CANNOT lie- has promised this for us,

Romans 8:18b

... the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.