

Evening Service

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[0 : 00] And as God would help me, I'd like to speak really on the whole book, I suppose, but primarily concentrating on verse 4 of chapter 2.

Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 4. We'll read it again. Speaking about the enemies of Israel. Behold, his soul is puffed up. It's not upright within him. But, but the righteous shall live by his faith. But the righteous shall live by his faith. The word faith.

The word faith is only twice in the whole of the Old Testament. From Genesis to the end of Malachi, the word faith only appears twice.

[1 : 13] But if the word faith only appears twice, the concept of faith pervades the whole of the Old Testament.

The best commentary on the Old Testament is what? The New Testament. What the New Testament says about the Old Testament.

That's the best commentary in the world. And we read there in one chapter of Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 11.

How often do we read, By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith.

By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. David. And so on. The Old Testament is full of the concept of faith.

[2 : 17] Although the word only appears twice. This verse, the last part of this verse, we're speaking on, verse 4, chapter 2.

It's quoted three times in the New Testament. Romans 1.17, Galatians 3.11, and Hebrews 10.38. But it's interesting to note, am I right? We normally speak about, you know, the just live by faith. And when we use that, we're thinking of the Christian's conversion.

Am I right? That we live by trying to be good until we're converted to Christ, when we realize we can't earn salvation by being good enough.

So we turn over to faith. We think of living by faith as a conversion experience. That, of course, is correct.

[3 : 24] But the use, especially in the Old Testament, of the concept of faith is not as a one-off conversion experience.

It is used as that. But the greater use is the continuing act of faith in the Christian life. It's not just something that happens at the beginning of our conversion.

It's an ongoing practice. It's a continual behavior, conduct, lifestyle. It's a lifestyle of the Christian. We live constantly, day by day, by faith. And we've got that here exactly as well.

The book, as we read, started off with Habakkuk. And in chapter 1, verse 2, we can ask the question, how can the man in chapter 1, verse 2, who's crying there, Lord, how long shall I cry for help?

[4 : 38] And you will not hear. How long do I cry out violence? And you will not save. How can that man be the same man as in the last verses of the book?

Who says, Though the fig tree shall not blossom, nor fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive fail, the fields yield no fruit, no flock in the stall, no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in God.

How come? How can it be the same man so quickly going from what you could almost say, if not querying God's existence, he's certainly questioning his integrity.

How can that man turn so quickly to a situation where he is praising God, and he will continue to praise and say, God is my strength.

What makes the big difference? What comes between chapter 1, verse 1, and the last chapter and the last verse? What comes in between to make such a difference to one man?

[5 : 57] A vision from God and a prayer to God. That's what makes the difference.

So as God would help us, let's look a bit more closely at it. And there are four headings. Habakkuk's problem, Habakkuk's vision, Habakkuk's prayer, and Habakkuk's song.

So what's Habakkuk's problem? Or his oracle is verse 1 in chapter 1 says, or he's burdened.

Well, there's several things in it. Number one, it's the condition of God's people. God's people.

He's not talking here about heathen, pagan nations. The land is filled with bribery. It's filled with violence. It's filled with corruption. It's filled with lawlessness.

[7 : 11] That's his complaint. The condition of God's chosen, blessed people. They've gone to the dogs, as we say.

Violence, bribery, corruption. God's holy people. That's the first aspect of his problem.

But then there's something else. There's something else burning him. Unanswered prayer.

Hasn't the Lord said, call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you. That's what Habakkuk's doing. And he says, Lord, how long do I cry for help to you?

And you will not hear. Is that familiar? Can you identify with that? Have you got that experience?

[8 : 17] You see, he's not just praying for a long time without an answer. He's praying for something God wants.

He's praying that the land will be rid of corruption. He's praying that the people of God would become holy. And God still doesn't answer.

Is that familiar to you? Can you identify with the prophet? Well, let me tell you this. You're in the very best of company. Amakuk.

Habakkuk. A prophet of God. That was his experience. You have David the psalmist. How often he had to complain. How often he had to cry out to God.

And it was as if God didn't hear. But there's a third problem. Not just the condition of God's people.

[9 : 17] Not just that God didn't answer his prayer. But since he started praying, things actually got worse instead of better.

That's quite common. That's quite common among the prophets of God. Before your prayer is answered, things get worse. Do you remember Moses?

Forty years in the wilderness. And he's called to lead Israel out. At the burning bush. The children know the story. And you remember God calls him.

And Moses argues with God. And he says, Lord, you've got the wrong man. I can't do it.

I'm not qualified. I'm not a speaker. I can't lead Israel out. You've got the wrong man, Lord.

[10 : 18] Ask someone else. Do you remember? Do you remember what happened? God, of course, as always, won the battle.

Moses goes and represents the people of Israel. And he goes into Pharaoh.

And what happens? Did Pharaoh listen to him? Did Pharaoh let the people go? What did he do? He said, Now, he says, I will make them make, require, I will require them to make the same amount of bricks without straw.

Made the situation harder. It got worse. Can you hear Pharaoh that night? Sorry. Can you hear Moses that night in his prayers?

Lord, I told you. You've got the wrong man. I can't do that. It's not working. That's the experience of God's choicest people.

[11 : 35] And if you've got that experience, take heart. Take heart. You're amongst the choice of God's flock. But you know, Habakkuk's burden was even something else.

It was a condition of God's people. It was a fact God wants in his prayer. It's a fact that things were getting worse instead of better since he started serving, obeying God.

But the real burden of his problem was God's reply. He couldn't make any sense of it. verse 5.

Look among the nations and see, wonder and be astounded. I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe it if told.

For behold, I'm raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own.

[12 : 46] There's two things he says in God's reply there. Number one, in the original, I am doing a work is emphatic.

It is as if God is saying to Habakkuk, Habakkuk, don't you dare say I'm doing nothing.

I am working. See how he puts it? I am doing a work in your days. I'm doing something now.

Now, as we'll discover, the results not for many, many years later on, but I'm preparing it now. God is a God who prepares his work and very often God takes years in preparation. Very often. I am working. I am hearing your prayer, Habakkuk, and I am doing something about it. [13:57] don't say I'm doing nothing. I am working. And I'm doing something so powerful that you wouldn't believe it if you heard it.

So, what is the message? What is it he's doing? He's raising up the Chaldeans to judge Israel. But you see, that's what goes for Habakkuk. He says, Lord, you're raising up that evil, bitter, wicked nation, the Chaldeans, to deal with Israel, your chosen people. You know what they've done already. You're on their side against us. He just can't believe it. Lord, how can you use them against us?

At least we're your people. At least we've got prophets and priests. At least we've got a temple. Okay, we're far from perfect, but you're going to use pagans to deal with us.

[15:07] He cannot get his head around it. So, that leads us to the second thing, Habakkuk's vision, and that's the whole of chapter two.

I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower and look out to see what he will say to me and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

You see what the position is? Habakkuk can't cope with things. He says, I need space, Lord. I need space.

to go away. I'm going to my watch tower. I'm going to my holiday retreat, you could say. I'm going to wait. I just can't cope with what's happening.

I want space. I need time to consider all this. It's too much for me. So, he goes away to meditate and think about things.

[16:10] And he's on his watch tower. And then, verse two, and the Lord answered me, write the vision, make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.

For still the vision awaits at appointed time. It hastens to the end, it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come, it will not delay.

He's told, make this message, this message I'm giving you in this vision, make it so clear that nobody will be in any doubt of it, and whenever they read it, they will run for help and support.

The message is extremely important, and the message is very urgent. And the message, as we've indicated already, well, the second message from verse, yeah, verse 2, verse 2, chapter 2, verse 2. God is chastening the Israelites with the Chaldeans, but, but Habakkuk, God is also going to punish the Chaldeans.

[17:34] Nobody gets off with wickedness in the last analysis. They either pay for it themselves, or my son pays for it, one or the other.

Nobody gets off scot-free with sin. His people will be chastised.

The wicked will be judged. See, there is technically a difference between chastisement and judgment. We do use the terms interchangeably, but it is important to grasp the concept.

Christ has paid for all the sins and taken all the punishment of his people.

But they're to be corrected. chastisement is correction. Am I right? You go astray, Christian, don't you? All you have to be put back. Chastisement is correction.

[18:42] It's been put back into light. It can be painful, but the whole objective has been put back. You stray off the path. Chastisement has been put back onto the correct path, and sometimes it takes years.

sometimes it takes years. But that's not technically punishment. It's correction. The wicked, they're punished.

They're judged. Judgment technically is different from chastisement. Chastisement is for God's own people where Christ took their judgment, Christ took their punishment, but when they go off stray, they're to be corrected in love.

In love. God's people are loved, and correction, chastisement, is love. But judgment is different. The Chaldeans were to be judged. And in the message, we're told here, wait if it hastens, if it appears to be slow, wait for it.

[19:53] It will surely come, it will not delay. The time when the Chaldeans were to be judged, were long way off, decades.

In fact, if I'm correct, Habakkuk never saw it. But that doesn't matter. He's worried about justice. One of the lessons we learn here is the wheels of God turn slowly.

and sometimes they turn so slowly you don't think they're turning at all. But it's a big mistake. God can wait. You and I by nature can't wait on God. We want it now. But we can't have it now. God doesn't always work immediately.

He always hears prayer. But God is an eternal being. And we find ourselves saying, look, I've been praying for this for 20 years.

[20 : 59] With God, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. In God's reckoning, our years of waiting are only a few hours to God.

He's an eternal being. We're human beings. And time is so important to us. God's beyond time. Time doesn't matter to God.

And we've to wait. We've to wait until God's time. But it's there you see our verse comes in. These, that day when the Chaldeans were to be judged was a terrible, terrible day.

But the righteous shall live by his faith. During these terrible times of judgment, the just, the believer, the Christian today, will still live by his faith.

Life will be so traumatic during that time. The world will be asking, do you worship a God like that? We said it in the pandemic, didn't we?

[22 : 17] The world was saying, how can you, how can you believe in a God that would let that happen? We're saying it when we look at our television screens, that's what's going on in Gaza. How can you believe in a God that would let that happen?

The world says, but the righteous will still live by his faith. In these awful times, the righteous, the Christian today, lives by trusting in God.

Still trusting him. He's in control. It's the end you look at, not the present, the end result. So the summary of his vision is, I am working, Habakkuk, but you have patience, you have patience. Habakkuk, you learn to wait on God. And that's a message to us. We need to wait on God. So thirdly, Habakkuk's prayer.

And that's Habakkuk chapter 3 verses 1 to 1 to well, it's actually 1 to 16, I suppose, is his prayer.

[23 : 36] Let's just look at three aspects of it. Revive your, O Lord, I've heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years, revive it.

In the midst of the years, make it known, in wrath, remember mercy. In the midst of the years, revive it.

Revive what? Revive what? revive your work, O Lord, your work.

You see, at this time, there was no leaders in Israel. Israel. The history of Israel was they always had great leaders.

Moses, well, Abraham to start off with. Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Ezra, David, terrific leaders.

[24 : 40] But there was no leaders now. There was no leaders at this time. In fact, it's just before what is called the 400 year silence.

I always feel so sorry for the Jews. If you were a Jew, I ask myself, what would I think if I was a Jew in the 400 year silence?

We believed that God would send a Messiah way back 4,000 years ago in the Garden of Eden. I will raise up a seed. You're waiting, and you're waiting, and you're waiting.

And you become, you're of the tribe of Judah, and you know the Savior's going to come. And there's no Savior. There's prophets, and there's prophets, and there's prophets, and there's prophets, but there's no Savior.

And you say, well, 4,000 years long enough to wait for someone and a promise, isn't it? Not in God's terms, a thousand years as one day.

[25 : 45] And then the prophets stop coming. me. I often ask myself, if I was living, well, say, 2,300 years ago, God stopped sending prophets now.

Do I believe? Do I still have faith? 4,000 odd years, but we've got prophets to keep reviving us and encouraging us, but now the prophets have stopped.

now the prophets have stopped. For 400 years, after Malachi, there's no one, no voice from heaven, no prophet has God raised up for Israel for 400 years until John the Baptist.

How's your faith doing? How would your faith do then? I think of the Jews. I think of, if I was a Jew then, oh boy, I don't know what I'd think. No prophets now.

It's a long time. Well, God can work without prophets, and that's Habakkuk. Lord, you don't need a prophet, you don't need a king, you don't need a leader, just bless us, revive your work in the midst of the years.

[27 : 08] There's no Moses, there's no Samuel, there's no David, but you can work without these, Lord, revive your work. In the midst of the years, what's he talking about?

Well, as we said, there's years before it's going to be fulfilled, years, decades before it's going to be fulfilled, but you say, Lord, in between the decades, in between the highs, in between the lows of our history.

And the history of Israel, you see, was highs and lows. It all started off with that wonderful, wonderful deliverance from Egypt when God parted the Red Sea.

World-famous event when God parted the Red Sea. It was a high, but what followed it? Forty years in the wilderness.

Forty years in the wilderness. A high followed by a low. Then they come to cross the Jordan, and they have to battle the Canaanites, and there's Jericho.

[28 : 24] What a victory. What a high that was. Thirty foot walls falling down without a battering ram, without a sword, blowing bugles.

God can do it. Taking down thirty foot wide walls of Jericho. What a high. What a high. What's the next thing in history?

They go to Ai, a little village, and they're hammered by the villagers. They can't overcome Ai, because of the Achan and the camp, of course, leaving that alone just now.

But you see, a high followed by a low. There's a great prosperous times in Israel's history of David and Solomon. What glory, what victory, what splendor in the temple that Solomon built.

High, followed by what? Seventy years in captivity in Babylon. It's all highs, and it's all lows.

[29 : 33] So he's saying, Lord, in between the decades, in between the prophets, in between the years of highs and lows, in the midst of the years, oh Lord, your work, your work, in the midst of the years of drought, come Lord, in wrath, remember mercy.

mercy. In wrath, remember mercy. He knew it was judgment on the wicked, and at the best, chastisement upon the righteous.

In wrath, remember mercy. In a time of judgment, we might say, what a nerve, asking for a revival, in a time of judgment.

What a nerve. not really, not really. God's a God of mercy. You see, judgment is based on desserts, what you deserve.

Mercy is not based on what you deserve. Mercy is not based on what you should get. Mercy is based on God's love.

[30 : 53] mercy. God's mercy. God's mercy and God's grace is actually, for you and me, quite a difficult concept to grasp, because it's not in the world.

Not in the world. There's a wonderful story which helped me greatly, and maybe it'll help you. I told about Napoleon. Napoleon. There was a deserter in the army who committed treason, and he was to be executed on a certain day, a young soldier.

And apparently his mother heard about it, so she said, I'm going to make a mission, and I'm going to speak to Napoleon. So she walked along, I don't know how far she went, but eventually she cried and she arrived the night before, and she got an appointment with Napoleon, and she said, my son, you are executing my son tomorrow morning.

Isn't that right? Yes, she said, that's right. Well, she said, I've come all the way from wherever she came, and she said, I'm asking you to have mercy on him and to pardon him.

I'm asking you to have mercy on him. And Napoleon said, why? Why should I show him mercy? He doesn't deserve it.

[32 : 28] Oh, the woman said, if he deserved it, I'd be asking for justice. I know he doesn't deserve it. I'm appealing to mercy, not based on what someone deserves.

And if I've got the story right, if I remember it correctly, Napoleon did pardon it. Whether it's true or not doesn't matter. It's the illustration.

Mercy is something you don't deserve, and you can ask God for it. Because you don't deserve it, and you can't ask for justice.

justice. And if we're seeking the Lord, it's quite important that we don't cross the line and say, well, the Lord's bound to answer my prayer. I mean, I've been praying for years, and I have done my best.

It's not very good, but I've tried my hardest. I think God's kind of entitled to give it to me. We've crossed over the wrong line there, friend. Mercy's not based on what you should get.

[33 : 38] Mercy's something you just don't deserve. The only qualification for mercy is you don't deserve it.

The moment you think you begin to deserve it, you have to move over to the justice department. And never do that, friend.

Never, never ask God for justice. Always ask God for mercy. So come now to Habakkuk's song. Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold, there be no herd in the stall.

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God the Lord is my strength.

[34 : 40] Although, although all these things happen. Now, bring it up to today, and bring it up to the situation in the church, in the western world.

The gospel, friends, is flourishing worldwide. Worldwide. Mainly in the, what we call the developing world or the third world.

In the western world, it's struggling. although there's no growth in the congregations, although there's no converts, although no one's applying for the ministry, no students in the church, although our young people are not going in for mission work, although the pews are empty, no heard in the stall, no one to hear the gospel, although all our evangelistic attempts have brought nothing in. What's Jeremiah saying? Sorry, what's Habakkuk saying? Although all that situation arises, he's more or less saying this, never again, never again will I look to appearances.

never again will I go by my feelings. Never again will I question what God is doing.

[36 : 18] I'll take God at his word. I'll take Christ at his word. He's building his church. We go by feelings.

We go by what we see with our eyes. We go by what God has promised and what Christ has done. That's what we keep our eye on.

Now as we close, what made the difference? From sorrowing, sighing, to singing a song, a song of faith, a vision from God, and a prayer to God.

Do you say, that was all right for Habakkuk, he got a vision. I didn't get a vision. I beg your pardon. No vision?

I beg your pardon. What's this? That's a revelation from God. God. There's far more there than Habakkuk had.

[37 : 34] Far more. No such thing as pocket Old Testaments in these days. We've got far more than Habakkuk had. And we've got it in writing.

a divine communication. For God has said, he's in control.

He has a plan. He's made a promise. And he's got the power. Do you know what faith is for?

Faith is for when God appears to be doing nothing. But he only appears. Think of the farmer.

What would you think of a farmer? You saw him sowing seed. And the next morning he goes out.

Where's the potatoes? Where's the carrots?

[38 : 30] The farmer knows it takes time. God is not in the hurry that you and I are. But God is faithful.

God is faithful. God keeps his promises. God's plan is bang on schedule. It's not running late.

It's not running late. It's on schedule. And he's got the power. And he's got the desire. And he will do what he says.

How's your faith? How's your faith? Can we say of you what said of Habaug the righteous shall live by his faith?

May God the Holy Spirit make his word effectual to every one of us. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven be pleased to take the things of Christ and to make them ours here tonight.

[39 : 41] Give us this vital living faith that saves the soul and helps us live by rejoicing in God. Now hear, now forgive, now bless, as we pray all in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. We conclude our service of worship by singing from Psalm 28 in the Scottish Shelter. Psalm 28 in the Scottish Shelter, that's page 238.

238. We sing from verse 6 to the end. Forever blessed be the Lord, for graciously he heard the voice of my petitions and prayers did regard.

Down to the last verse, O thine own people do thou save, bless thine inheritance, them also do thou feed, and them forever more advance.

Psalm 28 at verse 6, forever blessed be the Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[40 : 54] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
port across The Lord's my strength, and shield my heart, upon him did rely.

And I have held with hence my heart, the joy exceedingly.

And with my soul I will embrace, whereas with this God alone, He also is the saving strength of this
anointed one.

For thine old people do us sing, bless thine inheritance.

The walls of whom I feed and lend forevermore advance.

[43 : 06] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy
Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore.

Amen.