

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon: From Woe to Glory

Pastor Ryan Beattie

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⁵ indeed, wine betrays him;
he is arrogant and never at rest.
Because he is as greedy as the grave
and like death is never satisfied,
he gathers to himself all the nations
and takes captive all the peoples.

⁶ “Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying,

“Woe to him who piles up stolen goods
and makes himself wealthy by extortion!
How long must this go on?”

⁷ Will not your creditors suddenly arise?
Will they not wake up and make you tremble?
Then you will become their prey.

⁸ Because you have plundered many nations,
the peoples who are left will plunder you.
For you have shed human blood;
you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

⁹ “Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain,
setting his nest on high
to escape the clutches of ruin!

¹⁰ You have plotted the ruin of many peoples,
shaming your own house and forfeiting your life.

¹¹ The stones of the wall will cry out,
and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.

¹² “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed
and establishes a town by injustice!

¹³ Has not the Lord Almighty determined
that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire,
that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?”

¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁵ "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors,
pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk,
so that he can gaze on their naked bodies!

¹⁶ You will be filled with shame instead of glory.
Now it is your turn! Drink and let your nakedness be exposed!^a
The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming around to you,
and disgrace will cover your glory.

¹⁷ The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,
and your destruction of animals will terrify you.
For you have shed human blood;
you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

¹⁸ "Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman?
Or an image that teaches lies?
For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation;
he makes idols that cannot speak.

¹⁹ Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!'
Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!'
Can it give guidance?
It is covered with gold and silver;
there is no breath in it."

²⁰ The Lord is in his holy temple;
let all the earth be silent before him.

Habakkuk 2:5-20

Transcript:

Well, welcome again. If you are just joining us, I am Ryan Bede, the director of our Belong and Grow team [inaudible 00:00:07], and it's great to be with you wherever you are at. About the time I was halfway through high school, my mom started doing this kind of unnerving thing. I'd come home from school or work and I'd share about something that was hard that day and then she would say something to the effect of, "If you think that's hard, just wait until..." Fill in the blank, wait until college finals, wait until you have to pay your own bills, give up that commercial free Hulu account, whatever the hard stuff of life that was coming was.

And it continued even as I was a parent, I have a three year old throw a tantrum in the grocery store, I'd tell her about it and she would say, "How they are at three is how they'll be at 13." And this was terrifying, one, because she's a retired family therapist and two, because I'd get this picture of a giant 13 year old version of my kid laying on the Costco aisle, throwing his arms and legs around because I won't

buy him whatever it is, cereal that he wants, right? But looking back, I have grown to be grateful for that, because in fact, as life goes along, things sometimes get harder.

Now listen, a lot of things get better in life, richer and more meaningful. But as we grow, as we age, it's inevitable that hard times will come. Hard times that we bring on self-inflicted stuff and hard times that come for reasons outside of our control. Now we've been in this sermon series, nevertheless, where we've been looking at what the book of Habakkuk has to say to the question, "When the world is falling apart, is there any reason to hope?" And Habakkuk is part of this group called the minor prophets, right? Minor in this case just means shorter in terms of book length, compared to the major prophets Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah.

And Habakkuk and Jeremiah are actually alive at the same time, living in the Southern Jewish kingdom of Judah. Now we don't know a lot about Habakkuk, we don't know who his mom is, we don't know if he's country or hip-hop, if he's tall or short, skinny or fat, crunchy or creamy, we don't know any of that stuff. But what we do know and see here is that he is determined and passionate to hear from God and he believes God will answer him. Now, unlike Jeremiah and the other prophets, Habakkuk never addresses the people of Israel in his book. What we see here is more of this intimate and intense conversation between him and God, because Habakkuk is frustrated with how corrupt and oppressive his Jewish kingdom has become.

It's full of violence, it's full of conflict and as pastor Scott mentioned in week one, they had began worshiping other false gods and idols and had stopped caring for the four groups God had asked them to do that with. Widows, orphans, the poor, and resident aliens. And so Habakkuk is crying out, pounding on God's door in a sense saying, "How long, oh Lord, until you do something?" And eventually God answers and He says, yes, He's going to do something, something Habakkuk wouldn't believe if he hadn't been alive to see it for himself. God says He's going to allow the even more corrupt, even more violent and even more oppressive nation of Babylon to overthrow Judah and haul its best and brightest back to Babylon to live in exile for 70 years. And you can read more about that in the book of Daniel.

This is not the answer Habakkuk expected, and he expresses his disbelief and essentially asks this question again, the one that many in our world are asking right now, "How long Lord?" And eventually God does respond and that's what we're going to look at today. God's second response to Habakkuk that we find in chapter two. But first a couple of things to look at that will help us understand and appreciate what the prophet records for us, and the first one is just an observation. Today sermon is like that second movie or the second book in a trilogy, it's that movie that everyone knows they have to get through in order for the finale to make sense, but it sort of leaves you unsettled and it doesn't offer a lot of resolution.

If you're Lord of the Rings fans, were more Two Towers this week, next week, pastor Annie gets Return of the King. So that's where we are this week, we've arrived at this super upbeat part of the book known as the Five Woes of Habakkuk. And this is not like, woe horse or the little baby song, but more woe is me. And this word, woe, carries some meaning as it shows up in several places in the Prophetic Books and in the Old Testament. And Jesus actually uses it a lot, especially when he's addressing the religious leaders of His day. For example, Matthew 23, He says, "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees hypocrites." And

the word, well, it usually comes right before the speaker or writer announces judgment or impending doom that God's condemnation and wrath is coming.

So if you're dying to hear more sermons on God's wrath, you are in luck. And in this case in Habakkuk 2, it's God declaring woes to the Babylonians. He describes their evil and oppressive behavior, He offers some insight into why they do these things. And then God let's them know that though they are achieving a certain amount of glory through their military victories and conquering all these lands, it will not last. Eventually they will exchange their glory for shame as they are destroyed. Which brings me to the second thing we need to discuss before getting into it, we've got to talk about sin. And I know, you simply can't believe your luck that we are going to hear about wrath and sin in the same sermon. And I'm just going to point out it's a little suspicious that Dudley went on vacation right before preaching this part.

Okay, here we go. The S word. Now, if you're anything like me, too often I think about sin as the things I do wrong, it's all about my behavior, right? How I treat other people, whether or not I do bad or moral things, stuff I know that maybe God doesn't want me to do like lie, steal, mock, judge, say mean things to Mikayla, cheat on my taxes or my math final, whatever it is. And listen, those are bad things and I shouldn't do them, but if I stopped there, that's not really a complete understanding of sin. And believe it or not, it's actually important that we have a full and accurate understanding of sin to be able to one, identify the full reality of the problem so that two, we can have faith in the fullness and power of God's solution.

If we have too small of an understanding of sin, which I think we often do, then we'll have too small of an understanding of God's redemption and healing. Genesis chapter one records the story of creation, the heavens and the earth, the mountains and the seas, plants and animals, and eventually man and woman. And after God has finished with creation, it says in verse 31, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." Now there's a Hebrew word that captures this image of the goodness of creation, and that's the word Shalom. It's not in the passage, but it captures the goodness that we see there.

Here's how one, a biblical scholar defines Shalom, "The wedding together of God, humans and all creation, injustice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call Shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a ceasefire between enemies. In the Bible is Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight, a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its creator and savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom in other words is the way things ought to be, God humans in creation. We experience Shalom when these relationships are flourishing, humans to God, humans to humans, and this means individuals, groups, nations, institutions, and humans to creation itself. When those three relationships are flourishing, like we see in Genesis 1, that is Shalom."

Now we know we don't live in Genesis 1, we experienced glimpses of Shalom, but it's not our reality and that is because of sin. Anything that continues to damage the way God intended things to be is sin, or as Plantinga calls it, "The vandalism of Shalom." Our relationship with God is not perfect, we no longer experience the intimacy, the direct access with God that we see in the Garden of Eden. Something is fundamentally broken in our relationship with God. And it's the same with one another, we are intended to live at peace with each other, at every level and type of relationship but instead we are

fearful, judgmental, hurtful, bigoted, and even oppressive towards one another. Shame has entered our hearts and minds and something is fundamentally broken and our relationship with each other.

And even creation itself, we do not relate to the earth and its resources the way we were meant to, and things are not what they're supposed to be at a macro level of the environment, all the way down to a microscopic viral level as we're experiencing right now. Does your life feel vandalized? Now, listen, nobody likes to talk about sin, I am a textbook extrovert. I'm full of feelings and I want everyone to like me, but I have learned to appreciate understanding sin because again, if we don't have a full understanding of its impact in the world and how far it stretches, then we won't really, truly recognize the scope and impact of God's healing through Jesus.

My wife and I worked with a lot of amazing doctors and nurses last year when she went through cancer treatment. They really are true life heroes, and I even got to give capes to her team when she finished her treatment and we are incredibly thankful to God that a year later she's doing well. But if we'd walked into the office on that first day and they had prescribed two aspirins and a Band-Aid, they would have radically underdiagnosed the scope of the problem. And we would not have had the solution that we needed. And so now as we move to Habakkuk 2, we'll see two things about God. First, He does not allow injustice to go on forever and like a good doctor, He is honest and accurate about the effects of sin in the world.

So let's watch and listen for where the breakdown in relationship is happening, where Shalom has been vandalized. Habakkuk 2, we'll start in verse 5, "Indeed, wine betrays him, he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself, all the nations and takes captive all the peoples." Now right away we see the evil of this empire and it's arrogance that causes it to believe that it can simply take and take with an appetite as endless as the grave. Verse 6, "Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, 'Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion, how long this go on?' Well, not your creditor suddenly arise. Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their prey.

Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed human blood, you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin. You have plotted the ruin of many peoples shaming, your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, the beams of the woodwork will echo it." In other words, the very materials that they have stolen to build up their own wealth, to build their own houses will literally testify against the Babylonians. And we can contrast this with Jesus's words when He enters Jerusalem towards the end of His life on the donkey. And he says, "If the crowds were silent, the rocks themselves, the stuff of His creation would cry out with praise."

Back to verse 12, "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice. Has not the Lord almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskins till they're drunk so that he can gaze on their naked bodies. You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn, drink and let your nakedness be exposed. The cup of the Lord's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory.

The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed human blood, you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman? Or an image that teaches lies? For the one who makes it trust in his own creation, he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life.' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up.' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver, there is no breath in it. The Lord is in His Holy temple, let all the earth be silent before Him."

These 15 verses are a terrifying description of what Babylon does to their enemies, as well as what should be a terrifying warning to the Babylonians about what's coming. Empires like theirs don't last, eventually what they have done will be done to them often by those they victimized. And so we see the brokenness of relationship between people all over this passage. They enslave people they see as inferior, they steal to build their own wealth, they practice coercion and violence to take what they want, they abuse and take advantage of their captives and again, God says, literally the stones and beams of their homes will cry out.

We also see the brokenness of relationship between the Babylonians and God. Especially, in the final three verses where God says, they've come to trust in their own creation, rather than in Him... In their own glory. There's almost a mocking tone from God as He says, "Woe to him who says to the wood, 'Come to life.' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up.'" And then we even see the brokenness between Babylonians and creation. Verse 17 talks about Lebanon. Now Lebanon was this beautiful wooded area along the Western border of Israel. And the Bible tells us King Solomon used the Cedar, the wood of Lebanon in the building of the temple. Again in verse 17, it says, "The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you and your destruction of animals will terrify you."

It's quite a description of the vandalism of Shalom we talked about earlier. And I get it, we struggle with passages like this because there is so much pain and suffering. But Habakkuk's vision is also a gift to us, because he models just how honest we can be with God and how honest God is with us. Like a Habakkuk, we look around our world and say, "How long, oh Lord?" We ask the same question that Scott asked when he opened the series, "When the world is falling apart, is there any room for hope?" Let's look back at verse 16. It says, "You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn, drink and let your nakedness be exposed. The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming around to you and disgrace will cover your glory."

Now this language of a cup of judgment, coming from the Lord is in several places, in the Old Testament and the prophetic writings and in the Psalms. And it's all in passages describing God's hatred of sin and injustice, the breaking of Shalom. Again, Jeremiah was writing about the same situation as Habakkuk and he says this, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel said to me, 'Take from my hand this cup, filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you, drink it.'" And Psalm 75, it says, "In the hand of the Lord, is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices. He pours it out and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to it's a very dregs."

And then Isaiah 51, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel said to me, 'Take from my hand, this cup filled in with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you, drink it.'" Over and over again, this image of the cup of God's wrath, His wrath against the breaking of Shalom comes up. But

then something shifts, towards the end of Isaiah 51, which records God talking about the future salvation of His people, we see this, verse 22. "This is what your sovereign Lord says, your God, who defends His people, 'See I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger, from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again.'"

God makes a startling promise that at some point He will take away the cup of judgment against sin. We look ahead in Matthew's gospel, we read that on the night He was betrayed and arrested, Jesus went to pray in the garden of Gethsemane, with His disciples. And in chapter 26, verse 38, it says this, it says, "Then he said to them," Jesus talking to his disciples, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little further, "He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, 'My father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'"

The great physician, Jesus, recognized how deep and costly the effects of sin are on the world. He saw the cup of wrath that came for the Babylonians, and if we're honest, the cup that's intended for us. It's not communion Sunday, but I've been struck this week reflecting on the words of Jesus, when he shared communion in the upper room with his disciples. Remember that he says, "This cup is the new covenant poured out in my blood for the forgiveness of sin." And then Paul later adds, "Every time we drink from the cup," not the old cup of sin and wrath, but the new cup, the new covenant of forgiveness, "We proclaim His death until He comes again."

As one friend reminded me this week, Jesus didn't just die for us, He died as us. He drank the cup intended for you and me and made a way. Back into relationship with God, back into relationships with one another, and with creation itself. Where are you looking for healing in your relationships? Jesus has made a way and it's why we can sing and have hope, and it's why I think we should sing some Christmas songs even in July. I used to groan whenever we would get to, "Joy to the world." I'm going to wrap up with this, we'd get to joy to the world. Never was my favorite song. But as my understanding of sin and grace grew, I began to fall in love with verse three. Now this is the verse I should point out that often gets cut for time so we can get to the other verses about grace and love.

And I just want to make my plea now heading into Christmas that we'd leave this verse in, because it says this, "No more, let sins and sorrows grow nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to me because blessings flow, far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found." Isn't that powerful? Regardless of how pervasive the curse of sin and broken relationships are, no matter how broken your relationship with God may feel, no matter how divided people seem, or how broken our relationship with creation itself is, Jesus has made a way. He came to make His blessings known everywhere. And this is the Shalom that He invites us to seek with Him, the work that he has called us to do, to seek the Shalom with Him until He comes again.

Let's pray. Jesus, we rejoice and worship the truth that you have made a way. In your great love for us, Lord, you took the cup intended for us and set us free. I pray that that freedom would reverberate out into every home and every place that's listening right now, and that in that Lord, we would feel your call to bring that healing to the world around us. We pray all of this in your strong name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Please read Habakkuk 2:5-20

1. Habakkuk 2:5-20 opens with describing the Babylonians as arrogant and closes in verse 18 describing their idolatry. What is the relationship between those two sins and how else God describes their behavior in this passage?
2. How do you feel about God allowing the Babylonians to conquer Judah as a way to correct the sins of His people?
3. What does it say about God that He is describing the fall of the Babylonians as well?
4. What do you think the "knowledge of the glory of the Lord" refers to in 2:14?