

“A Watchman of Faith” (Habakkuk 1–2:4)(6.13.21)

Habakkuk 1–2:4 (NIV84)

1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.

² How long, O Lord, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?

Or cry out to you, “Violence!”

but you do not save?

³ Why do you make me look at injustice?

Why do you tolerate wrong?

Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.

⁴ Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.

The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.

⁵ “Look at the nations and watch—
and be utterly amazed.

For I am going to do something in your days
that you would not believe,
even if you were told.

⁶ I am raising up the Babylonians,
that ruthless and impetuous people,
who sweep across the whole earth
to seize dwelling places not their own.

⁷ They are a feared and dreaded people;
they are a law to themselves
and promote their own honor.

⁸ Their horses are swifter than leopards,
fiercer than wolves at dusk.

Their cavalry gallops headlong;
their horsemen come from afar.

They fly like a vulture swooping to devour;

⁹ they all come bent on violence.

Their hordes advance like a desert wind
and gather prisoners like sand.

¹⁰ They deride kings
and scoff at rulers.

They laugh at all fortified cities;
they build earthen ramps and capture them.

¹¹ Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—
guilty men, whose own strength is their god.”

¹² O Lord, are you not from everlasting?

My God, my Holy One, we will not die.

O Lord, you have appointed them to execute judgment;
O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.

¹³ Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
you cannot tolerate wrong.

Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?

Why are you silent while the wicked
swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

¹⁴ You have made men like fish in the sea,
like sea creatures that have no ruler.

¹⁵ The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks,
he catches them in his net,
he gathers them up in his dragnet;
and so he rejoices and is glad.

¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net
and burns incense to his dragnet,
for by his net he lives in luxury
and enjoys the choicest food.

¹⁷ Is he to keep on emptying his net,
destroying nations without mercy?

2 I will stand at my watch
and station myself on the ramparts;
I will look to see what he will say to me,
and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

² Then the Lord replied:

“Write down the revelation
and make it plain on tablets
so that a herald may run with it.

³ For the revelation awaits an appointed time;
it speaks of the end
and will not prove false.
Though it linger, wait for it;
it will certainly come and will not delay.

⁴ “See, he is puffed up;
his desires are not upright—
but the righteous will live by his faith—
The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“A Watchman of Faith”**

INTRODUCTION:

Do you know what a guard frequency is? There are many government agencies that monitor guard frequencies, but my experience was with the Coast Guard. For each radio band, there is a designated emergency frequency that would be constantly listened to, in other words, constantly guarded. This applies to maritime vessels and it applies to aircraft.

If someone is in dire distress, they would flip one switch to automatically go to the guard frequency. Then they press or key the transmitter and declare Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. This is the fishing vessel Mary Lou taking on water. Or, Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, this is Coast Guard helo 6012. We have lost an engine.

Each Coast Guard unit maintains communications with their vessels and their aircraft. Every fifteen minutes you would report back to the unit on a regular working frequency to report “operations normal” with your current position. If you failed to report, every effort is made to establish communications. If that is unsuccessful, an emergency will be declared and a search will be initiated using your last known position.

Everyone monitors the guard frequencies. When an emergency is declared then rescue efforts are coordinated and you are authorized to use the guard frequency to do so. In addition to local units, the Coast Guard has larger regional communications stations with more sophisticated equipment. And for some years now, vessels and aircraft have salt water activated emergency locator beacons that transmit a signal to satellites.

BODY:

The prophet Habakkuk is a watchman of faith. He sees that his nation is in dire distress. He is heartsick over the sinful and fallen condition of the people. God's Chosen People are living in a culture of violence. Habakkuk paints a very dark picture – using the colors gray, brown, black, and the deep red of blood. He cries out to God, Mayday, mayday, mayday: Violence with an exclamation point surrounds him. Violence coupled with destruction. Habakkuk cannot escape seeing injustice. Strife is anger or bitter disagreement over fundamental issues. Conflict abounds. It is everywhere and it seems nothing is exempt from the conflict.

Last Sunday, I participated in a Pro-Life rally in Northfield. One of our state legislators has authored a bill that will expand abortion on demand. He owns a market in Northfield. So, the rally took place on the sidewalks on both sides of the street in front of the market.

There were signs: pray to end abortion; save the babies; adoption not abortion; and, the like. Scripture was read. Prayers were prayed. Some of the passing cars waved and beeped encouragement. Other cars gave us the finger and made angry gestures. One man yelled out, "Kill the babies." Then he laughed one of those maniacal laughs I thought only happened in the movies.

Violent crime was up significantly last year and this year the trend continues. I believe we are seeing a ripple effect due to that violence. On the Galloway Happenings Facebook Group, there is a lot of posting about how hard the local rental market has become. When I got my haircut this week, the barber was lamenting that she and her son were staying in a friend's studio apartment in Atlantic City. She was having a terrible time finding a two bedroom apartment she could afford. Homes are selling quickly and it is being called a seller's market. People are trying to escape the cities and the violence.

Habakkuk described his situation as so bad that the law was paralyzed. Can we not identify with Habakkuk's complaint? Some cities have defunded law enforcement. The courts are jammed with long wait times. Jails are overcrowded so badly that prisoners are given early release. The culture is "sue happy" and the lawyers solicit for more business.

Remember also that this meant God's law was paralyzed because the society's law was derived from the scripture. Again, we can empathize with Habakkuk. What once was unlawful is now not only legal, but often receives government support. Evil is called good and good is called evil.

Imagine what it must have been like for Habakkuk to say, "Justice never prevails. Justice is perverted." The wicked surround the righteous. There is oppression. There is abuse. The whole of the societal system seems to permit the wicked to prosper while those that honor God perish.

Habakkuk, a watchman of faith, turns the switch of his communications equipment to the guard frequency and announces the emergency. He prays to the LORD, my God, Holy One. But, something is wrong. There is no response. There is no answer.

Because he lives by faith, he continues to pray; and, then prays some more. How long, O Lord, must I call for help? But you do not listen. But you do not save. How long? How long? Maybe you can identify with Habakkuk. Maybe you have been in his sandals.

Finally, an answer comes; but, it is not a welcome answer. The Lord is going to do the unbelievable. Do not miss the fact that God is saying He is sovereign. God is in control of history. The Lord used the Assyrians. Now, He will raise up the Babylonians to conquer the Assyrians and to become a great and fearful empire. They will be an instrument of correction, a purifying fire of affliction for God's Chosen People.

The Lord knows exactly what these Babylonians are like and still He chooses to use them. They are ruthless, impetuous, a feared and dreaded people. Their pride is described in several ways. Their military might comes upon all as an overwhelming flood that nothing can withstand. They worship themselves and their weapons of destruction. They are pagans and idolaters.

God has given Habakkuk his answer of judgment. And the Lord was correct, as always; even what has been revealed is difficult for Habakkuk to apprehend. While God is his Rock who is pure and holy, how is it that this treacherous people have been ordained to punish Judah? Twice we are told here that God cannot tolerate wrong.

Notice that Habakkuk loves the Lord, respects God, fears the Almighty; but, at the same time he engages his Creator. He bares his heartache and frustration before God.

Notice the huge factor of time that Habakkuk is conveying to us. How Long? God tells him to watch and wait, "For I am going to do something in your days." Surely, Habakkuk is thinking, "When will that be?" God is in the process of raising up the Babylonians. They have many battle before they will get to Judah. God has been silent, indicating an expanse of time. When it is time for the Lord to reply to Habakkuk's second complaint, He says, "The revelation awaits an appointed time. Though it linger, wait for it. It will certainly come."

Waiting can be hard, very hard. The doctor insists on a biopsy. Waiting for the test results is hard. Your son, daughter, brother, or sister has been deployed overseas in a hazardous area. It has been six months now. You haven't heard from them in three weeks. When will an organ donor become available? You have sent out 125 resumes and sent follow-up letters. Someone please call.

Habakkuk, the faithful watchman, promises to go back to work to assume his duties. Habakkuk will stand his watch and station himself on the wall. He puts himself in proper position to watch and see. A watchman is alert, diligent, disciplined, and dutiful. Sometimes a night on watch is very long and the daylight seems quite slow in coming. Then night follows night and where is the revelation?

Over my 28.5 years in the US Coast Guard, I stood a variety of watches. One of those required the use of a DETEX Watchstander's Clock. It looked something like a canteen with a clock on it. There was a strap so you could carry it over your shoulder and keep your hands free. Inside of it was a paper disk that rotated with the time. There was a key hole in the side of the DETEX clock.

Around the unit or station there would be small metal boxes with a key inside. It was attached with a chain. When you make your rounds, at each one of these points, you take the key and insert it into the clock and turn it. Each key is different and makes a unique perforation on the paper disk. This records the time you were at each check-in point.

Your watch standing had several purposes. You were making sure no one was out and about making mischief. You made sure there was no trespassing. You were on the lookout for fire. If there was a safety issue or something was broken you might note it for the morning or notify someone when immediate action was required.

It could be boring. Sometimes the hardest part was staying awake and the seconds slowly ticked by. You were required to record all that happened, or didn't happen, in a log book. You would record the time of each event. At the end of the watch, you would sign the log and brief your relief on the current situation. You were held accountable. Your log book was reviewed. Your DETEX clock could be examined to make sure each round was completed fully and on time.

Like Habakkuk, each Christian is called to be a faithful watchman. We will be held accountable. The book of our life will be examined. The Bible has a lot to say about a day of reckoning – here is but one verse from the lips of Jesus in Revelation 3:5 (NIV84) "He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels."

The Lord replied to Habakkuk, "The righteous will live by faith." To this point, you might not have realized that this is part of the sermon series we have been in for four weeks now. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live supernatural lives when we live by faith. What does it mean to live by faith? We see some answers to that question in today's text. Living by faith means having a heart attuned to the things of God. You love justice and hate wickedness. You love the law and ways of God. You have a relationship with the Lord where you can bare your soul and your heartache.

When the going gets tough, the faithful go to God. You are faithful in your duties for the people and for the kingdom of God. You have patience and you persevere. You proclaim God's will to the people, because that is what a prophet does. You trust God and His promises even when the answer to your prayers is not what you hoped it would be.

How do we nurture and sustain our faith in the face of adversity? To use the DETEX Watchstander's Clock as a metaphor, what are the keys to activating our faith in our daily walk? We will briefly address this now, but expand it in the weeks to come.

The first key point is that we must love God wholeheartedly. You have heard this so often that it almost sounds trite, but it is central to the security of our faith. This means spending time in relationship. This means pursuing knowledge and experience of God.

Of course, the automatic next key station is to love our neighbors as ourselves. This includes acts of mercy: feeding, clothing, and caring for others.

The next station, and remember that there is overlap and connection between each key station, is to worship God. This includes corporate worship in the Body of Christ and personal worship as you are intentionally aware of the Lord during the day.

Not surprisingly, the next station will be daily devotions. If at all possible, begin your day in alone time with God. There are so many devotional tools available to us today. Anywhere you take your phone can be a devotional space. You read God's word in a contemplative way and how others have applied that scripture to their lives and to their prayers.

As a natural development, you will want to study your Bibles. Through this study, the Holy Spirit can teach you about the indwelling Christ. God the Holy Spirit will teach you the meaning of the scriptures. How can you know the promises of God and claim those promises for yourself and your loved ones unless you know what God promises in His holy inspired word?

That brings us to the next key station, trusting God. Take what you have learned about God and not only believe it intellectually; but, literally bet your life on it. Romans 8:28 (NIV84) And **we know** that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

The last key station for now will be your prayer closet. While at each key station, pray; but at this one, let it become your War Room. If you have not seen the movie by that name, I highly recommend it. As a watchmen of faith, this is where we do battle.

Many people have been blessed by keeping a written record or logbook. Some people use prayer journals: naming people; your intercession for them; and, the results. My wife Carol keeps a daily gratitude list of three items each day. You may want to pour out your heart to God onto paper. In today's scripture we have a short account of Habakkuk's heartfelt concerns.

CONCLUSION:

Habakkuk was a prophet speaking to the southern kingdom of Judah. They should have known better. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been defeated and exiled by the Assyrians 125 years previous. They too had failed to respond to God's prophets and God brought judgement against them. How about us? Have we not seen God work throughout history? Will we not heed the lessons taught in scripture?

Over the last year or so, there has been a lot of wondering on social media if we are near End Times. Is Jesus' return and the Rapture at hand? No one but God the Father knows the answer. BUT, **the**

righteous will live by faith. Come Lord Jesus come!
Amen and amen. Let us pray.