



Message: God Doesn't See Evil

Series: Weird Stuff about God

Text: Habakkuk 1:1-11

Aug. 30-31, 2014

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1. Today we are starting a new series Weird Stuff about God. It is based on a conversation between the OT minor prophet Habakkuk and God.
 2. I want to give you a few introductory comments on our teaching in general.
 - a) A word about resources: A bibliography has been posted online so you can see what resources I have used for the exegetical work.
 - b) We do post study guides and sermon note sheets online. You can receive a copy of any manuscript just by asking.
 3. The Book of Habakkuk is short. It is only three chapters, fifty-six verses. We are going to spend the next five weekends unpacking this book.

Week 1:	God Doesn't See Evil	Habakkuk 1:1-11
Week 2:	God's Doesn't Do God Things	Habakkuk 1:12-2:1
Week 3:	God Makes Faith Hard	Habakkuk 2:2-5
Week 4:	God is Too Obscure	Habakkuk 2:6-20
Week 5:	God Shouldn't be a Minimalist	Habakkuk 3:1-19

 - a) I don't want you to think of this as a Bible study – but rather a journey of faith. “A genuine faith resolves the mystery of life by the mystery of God” Reinhold Niebuhr
 - b) We are going to take a journey with a man whose faith moves from questioning God to placing full trust in God even in the face of an uncertain future.
 4. Most of us have already encountered a situation that left us wondering “why”?
 - a) Sometimes it is in reference to personal issues – like why did I get cancer or perhaps why did my friend die from cancer and I survived?
 - b) Sometimes it is in reference to things we see in the world – like why does God let Christian moms and dads watch as their kids have their heads sawed off?
 - c) Sometimes it is in reference to things we think about real deep inside – like God is not the only god worshipped in the world so how do I know God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is THE God?
 5. So we are taking a faith journey with Habakkuk –
That's where we are going today in the Word of God - Before we start – let's pray!

Common God followers struggle with faith issues (1:1)

1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

1. Over the next couple of weeks we are going to take a faith journey with a man who believes in God but is struggling to understand how God works.
2. The man's name is Habakkuk.
 - a) That's all we know.
 - b) We don't know the name of his father or mother.
 - c) We don't know where he is from.
 - d) We don't know if he ever had a wife or children.
3. Scripture and historical records outside scripture are relatively silent about this man.
 - a) I like that.
 - 1) It makes Habakkuk believable to me.
 - 2) I can relate to him.
 - b) I don't have aspirations of being well known.

- c) I believe my life could be described as common and when compared to the world stage my life is even obscure.
4. But even common people have faith issues.
- a) I also relate to him because he was a prophet.
 - 1) Perhaps that means he “earned his living serving as a prophet at the temple or court” (Baker, 49) or it may mean he simply spoke on behalf of God.
 - 2) Either way he was in some way a religious person – but a common religious person.
 - b) This is not Abraham, Isaac or Jacob. This is not David or Solomon.
 - c) He does not even rank among the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel or Daniel.
 - d) He is a common religious person who struggles with issues of faith.
5. The book that bears his name is really a conversation between Habakkuk and God. In the beginning, Habakkuk is really struggling with a God who is silent regarding unjust treatment of religious people but in the end Habakkuk learned that “a matured faith trusts humbly but persistently in God’s design for establishing righteousness in the earth” (Robertson 136).
6. But the process of maturing is hard. Habakkuk writes about it and calls it an oracle. That word means burden. His burden was something he saw.

My idea of God is shaped by what I see around me (1:2-4)

- Our systematic theology of God is often challenged by the God of our experiences. We have accumulated a knowledge of God from skimming devotional thoughts, and sound bites from a religious TV broadcast or perhaps even a structured theology course.
 - And then a challenge comes. A real challenge. Something you don’t have an answer for. Something that doesn’t seem like God. Something that seems like evil. And all your lofty ideas about God crash.
1. **Convinced God can but disturbed because He won’t stop violence against the righteous (1:2)**
- ² *O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not hear?
Or cry to you “Violence!”
and you will not save?*
- a) Habakkuk has a problem with God and the problem is made more difficult because Habakkuk has been talking to God about it and God does not appear to be listening.
 - b) He begins his prayer with the phrase: **“O lord, how long...?”**
 - 1) This phrase “occurs sixty-five times in the Bible” (Miller, 57) most often in the Psalms where it usually “expresses anguish over God’s perceived delay in bringing justice” (Miller, 57).
 - 2) Habakkuk cries out to God “in the form of a lament, or psalm of complaint where a need is described and help is sought from God” (Baker, 49).
 - c) The words “how long” let us know this is not the first time Habakkuk has sought an audience with God to register his complaints.
 - 1) How long – God here I am once again asking – crying out – shouting to you for help.
 - 2) Again and again I have come and let you know I need help and I have cried out to you about the “violence”; the cruelty and the oppression and you will not save.
 - 3) You don’t provide victory.
 - d) I have a relationship with you.
 - 1) I keep coming to you.
 - (1) I keep crying to you.
 - (2) I keep asking.
 - 2) You are indeed my Lord and I keep coming and I keep crying.
 - 3) I keep seeking help from you. I am convinced you can deliver me but you won’t.

- 4) I am convinced you could help me overcome my oppressors but you won't.
- e) What a charge to bring against the Sovereign. What a bold charge to make against the Sovereign God.
 - 1) I believe in you. I believe so much I keep crying out.
 - 2) I believe you could help but you don't seem to hear and you won't get involved in helping me.
 - 3) We can't smooth this over. A "lament is the language of anger" (Barker, Bailey 283) and you can hear the anger in the words.
 - 4) Habakkuk is remembering how God in the past has acted in anger against the enemies of Israel and he is begging God for a "repeat performance" (Barker, Bailey 283).
 - 5) But this time God is silent. God is inactive.
2. **Convinced God won't because He is absent when He should be present (1:3)**

³ *Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.*

 - a) Habakkuk moves from the desperate cry of how long to the familiar cry of "why".
 - 1) Habakkuk is deeply disturbed by what he is seeing and he is even more disturbed that God is tolerating it.
 - 2) Not only does God have Habakkuk in a place where he has to look at injustice (that is what the word iniquity is referring to) but God is also idly looking or just standing there watching it.
 - 3) What are they watching?
 - b) Habakkuk lists six problems in three sets:
 - 1) Iniquity and wrong or your translation might say trouble and suffering
 - 2) Destruction or plundering and violence
 - 3) Strife and contention or conflict
 - c) What is Habakkuk describing? What is happening?
 - 1) "Habakkuk asked his questions at a time when hopes for justice and righteousness has been raised and dashed again and again in Judah" (Bruckner 209).
 - (1) About 100 years before any of this happened a group of people called the Assyrians came down from the north and captured the people of Israel – the **ten northern tribes of God's people (MAP)**.
 - (2) That's important because the two tribes of the south Judah and Benjamin knew about the capture and destruction of the northern tribes. In the south they had their share of bad kings and good kings.
 - 2) One of the good kings was a guy by the name of Josiah who was only 8 years old when he came to power. Let me capture the history of 2 Kings 22-24 in a few sentences.
 - (1) While Josiah was king they started cleaning and repairing the temple. While they were cleaning a priest found the scroll of Deuteronomy (the law) in the temple.
 - (2) Josiah the king had the book read and he had the people renew their covenant with God. They even celebrated the Passover. This was a great time for the people.
 - (3) But God was still angry with the people because of the sins of Manasseh, the king before Josiah.
 - (4) So Pharaoh Neco in 609 BC brought his army from Egypt and killed Josiah in a battle. The people made Jehoahaz the son of Josiah the king of Judah, but the Pharaoh captured him and deported him to Egypt and instead made another son Eliakim the king.

- (5) He changed his name to Jehoiakim and had him pay silver and gold and other taxes to the Pharaoh. The land was taxed, the income of the people was taxed, the servants were taxed. This was like living as the slaves of Egypt only now Egypt occupied your land. (2 Kings 22-24)
- 3) Habakkuk is saying to God, the government is corrupt. The people are corrupt.
- 4) I am watching our nation plummet. We have gone from the Passover keeping, Covenant keeping, circumcised people of God to the oppressed, suffering, destroyed, violent people who are constantly in conflict and you are doing nothing about it.
- d) And in addition to that Habakkuk is...
3. **Convinced the special resources of God are invaluable (1:4)**
- a) The problems Habakkuk complained about in verse three have created a situation he describes in verse 4.
- ⁴ So the law is paralyzed,
and justice never goes forth.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
so justice goes forth perverted.*
- 1) Justice – if it's repeated, it's important!!
- 2) Justice has become injustice.
- b) Habakkuk says "hey God – just a few years ago we were a society that based our justice on your rule of law and now that is gone". We are a society in disarray.
- 1) We are a special people who have a special resource – the law – a covenant that you have written down and given to us but it is paralyzed or it has become useless to us.
- 2) "The corruption of national politics is the historical context of his complaint" (Bruckner 209).
- 3) The people who are trying to live by that law cannot stand on that law because those who legislate and those who are making the rules don't consider the law.
- 4) The good people go to court but the judges are legislating from the bench and their rulings are not in favor of your people.
- c) Our whole political system is perverted.
- d) There you go God – that's my complaint. I am standing here looking at evil everyday and you should see it too – look at it God. You don't see it and you are supposed to.
- e) Habakkuk takes a deep breath and stops talking.

God's answer to our faith struggles (1:5-11)

*⁵ "Look among the nations, and see;
wonder and be astounded.*

*For I am doing a work in your days
that you would not believe if told.*

- Before we start to unpack God's answer we need to stop for a minute and reflect on this: God answered Habakkuk!
- It would be so easy to just rush right past this nugget. We can just read along and in the text verse 4 is followed by verse 5 so we might not even pause.
- Habakkuk is shaking his fist in the face of the sovereign God and demanding God to do something. God – you are leaning back on your heels and I want you to lean forward. I want you to get up off your throne and do something. I want you to get angry like you used to get angry and kill some people. I want you to destroy some people. I want you make things right.
- I know what you should be doing and you are not behaving as I think you should behave.

- WOW!!!! God doesn't kick Habakkuk to the curb. He doesn't tell him stop it! He answers with an explanation. It isn't what Habakkuk wants to hear but God opens Habakkuk's eyes to what He is up to.

1. Your view is too limited (1:5)

- a) Habakkuk challenged God with the words "look" "see" (v.3)
*Why do you make me see iniquity,
 and why do you idly look at wrong*
 - 1) God's response is to challenge Habakkuk with the same words (v.5a)
⁵ *"Look among the nations, and see;
 wonder and be astounded.*
 - 2) You are looking – but you are not looking in the right places. You are looking among the nation – what is happening around you – I am working among the nations (plural) to accomplish my purposes.
- b) Now the second thing you need to know about God's response is that God responded in the plural.
 - 1) Habakkuk spoke to God in the singular: *O Lord, how long shall I cry for help... Why do you make me see iniquity,*
 - 2) Habakkuk you are interested in how this is impacting you.
 - 3) You think because the people performed a few religious ceremonies for a few years and because one king obeyed my commandments that I owe you.
- c) But the hearts of the people have not changed – they are not prepared to recognize my glory and that is my purpose.

2. Rethink your idea of who God uses (1:5-6)

- a) Now let's put this together with the next part of the verse:
⁵ *"Look among the nations, and see;
 wonder and be astounded.
 For I am doing a work in your days
 that you would not believe if told.*
 - 1) This has got to be one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. It is often quoted as if God is about to unleash some incredible spiritual victories in some nations we never thought would turn to God. We use it as a verse to declare we believe God is about to turn some really dark places into places of eternal light and peace where Jesus is king.
 - 2) God is really saying to Habakkuk – if you are struggling with the evil you see being committed by the evil people of Judah against the righteous people of Judah you will really have a hard time with this one.
 - 3) I am so far ahead of you – I have gone outside and beyond the borders of these people and am working in the nations of pagans to bring "the fruit of unrighteousness to Jerusalem's doorstep" (Bruckner 211).
 - 4) What is God going to do that is going to be so shocking to Habakkuk?
- b) He is going to use the Babylonians to establish His fame throughout the earth.
⁶ *For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
 that bitter and hasty nation,
 who march through the breadth of the earth,
 to seize dwellings not their own.*
 - 1) The ESV which I read from says the "Chaldeans". The Chaldeans were actually "an ethnic group who succeeded in dominating Babylonia, but the term came to represent the Babylonians" (Miller 59) so we are really talking about the same pagan people.
 - 2) Who are these people?

f) Verses 6-9 offer a description of these people.

1) They were “bitter” or ruthless (v.6b,c)

(1) Back to 2 Kings 25. Babylon has already overthrown Egypt as the dominant world power and Nebuchadnezzar established Zedekiah as the king in Judah. Zedekiah was responsible for collecting the taxes and paying Nebuchadnezzar but this king rebelled against the king of Babylon. So Nebuchadnezzar took his army to Jerusalem and captured the city. Zedekiah tried to flee but he was captured along with his sons. The Babylonians killed all of his sons and then gouged out his eyes. “The last thing Zedekiah saw was his children massacred” (Miller 59).

(2) That is ruthless.

(3) But they were also “hasty” or impetuous. They were filled with greed for more land and more territory to conquer so they quickly subdued enemies and “seized dwelling not their own”.

2) Their fighting tactics earned them a reputation (v.7)

⁷ They are dreaded and fearsome;

(1) The words that are used to describe the peoples response to God himself (Ex. 34:10; Deut. 7:21; Zeph. 2:11; Mal. 1:14) are used to describe the peoples response to their enemies.

(2) They are the terrorist nation of Habakkuk’s day.

their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.

(a) They have established their own system of right and wrong.

(b) Their justice or rule of law is unique to them and permits them to “honor themselves” (Baker 51).

(3) These people have demonstrated power and they have unbelievable pride. Those two sins often marry up and produce devastating results.

(4) They had built an “irresistible military force” (Miller 60).

3) They have built a Calvary that is superior to anything seen before. (v.8)

(1) They are fast - in fact they are *swifter than leopards* (PIC).

Leopards are very agile, and can run at over 36 miles per hour, leap over 20 feet and jump up to 10 feet.

(2) and they are more ferocious than wolves (PIC) and they don’t stop. They *press proudly on*.

(3) There are a lot of them – you can hear them galloping *from afar*;

(4) And they swoop in to devour like an eagle (PIC)

4) They are relentless in their work and mission (v.9)

(1) They don’t take time to assess the situation – they come for one reason and only one reason; *violence*.

(2) There is no thought of turning back or walking away from the fight they come *all their faces forward*.

(3) And *They gather captives like sand*.

Interesting thought. God made a promise to Abraham that he would be the father of a nation with so many people they would number more than the sand.

5) There is no refuge from them (v.10)

¹⁰ *At kings they scoff,
and at rulers they laugh.*

(1) Every established kingdom is a joke to them. They run by and

(2) The terrorist nation fears no one.

*They laugh at every fortress,
for they pile up earth and take it.*

- (3) So far no one or no fortress has stopped them.
 - (4) They are a force of power and they know it. No one stands up to them and they have become so powerful no one can stand up to them. They are the world bullies.
 - 6) Well now Habakkuk knows and we know what God is going to do and who is going to use to do it.
 - (1) He is going to open the doors for a pagan nation to destroy his chosen people.
 - (2) Why?
 - 7) Let's dig for the answer in verse 11 and beyond.
3. **I exist for my glory not your comfort (1:11)**
- ¹¹ Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!"*
- a) Habakkuk says to God, "Why aren't You doing anything about this injustice we are living with?"
 - 1) Why aren't You doing anything about Your people defaming Your name? Why are You letting this go unchecked?"
 - 2) And God says, "Oh I'm not idle. I'm about to handle this. In fact, I'm about to send the Chaldeans, this bitter, hasty, morally perverse, powerful, arrogant, self-worshipping, God-dishonoring terrorist nation to show my people the ultimate outcome of unrighteousness."
 - b) Let's go back to 2 Kings 23:26
 - 1) This is after we read all about the reforms under Josiah the good king. He dismantled the altars and tore down the worship centers to the false gods. The people renovated the Temple and celebrated the Passover. Then you come to verse 26 – watch this:
...the Lord did not turn from the burning of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. ²⁷ And the Lord said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there."
 - 2) God wanted his name established on the earth and he planned to do it through his people in Jerusalem but they would not let it happen. T
 - 3) they kept selling out to other gods and other places of worship. God is not "getting even" with his people. He is letting them reap the ultimate harvest for what they have sown.
 - c) Just so you don't get too confused in God's response let's peek around the corner and see what God's purpose is. Turn to Habakkuk 2:14:
For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
 - d) That is God's ultimate goal. That is God's ultimate purpose. That is what God is after. That is where this whole thing will go for Habakkuk and that is where this whole thing will go for us.
 - e) Keep that in mind as we unpack this book.
 - f) That brings us to our bottom line for the day.

Bottom Line: The key to authentic faith is to be honest with ourselves about our faith!

For those not yet living a Jesus-centered life

1. Be honest – God isn't threatened by your questions and neither are we.
 - a) ILLUSTRATION: Chuck Cribben

For those living a Jesus-centered life

2. Be honest – it is the doorway to authentic worship.

- a) When we are honest about our doubts and run to the greatness of God it opens the door to authentic worship.
- b) Fear is a funny thing – when we cease to fear and worship the sovereign God who rules all powers we usually begin to fear the most powerful force we encounter. That is why the secret to living without fears is to live in fear of the sovereign God
- c) ILLUSTRATION: Nascar Race

On July 14, 2002 NASCAR rolled into the **Chicagoland Speedway (PIC)** for the Tropicana 400. My son Jason was a huge fan of the #12 car driven by **Ryan Newman (PIC)** and that week Ryan Newman won the pole which meant he was starting in first place. My driver was #24 Jeff Gordon. We sat down to watch the race and by watch the race I mean we watched the first 10 laps and then we went outside and played basketball.

We came back in to watch the race and one lap into a restart with only 70 laps left **Kevin Harvick (PIC)** steered his car to the apron or the bottom of the track and made a good pass but he lost it when passing on the apron and spun out into a grass in turn 1. That caused three other cars to lose control and spin out. Among the three were Elliott Sadler and Jimmy Spencer.

Two weeks later, on July 28 NASCAR rolled into **the Pocono Raceway (PIC)** in PA. for the PA 500. Once again my son Jason and I sat down to watch the race. **Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Steve Park wrecked on the first lap (PIC)**. The race was red flagged while the crew repaired the wall. Jason and I left the race to go play basketball.

Sometime later we came back in the house to cool off and catch up on the race. We were shocked to see Kevin Harvick once again try to pass on the bottom of the track and cause a wreck – exactly like the one we had seen two weeks earlier. We were staring at the TV stunned. Then the announcer came on to tell us the race in PA was under a “red flag” - stopped for rain and we were actually watching a replay of the race from two weeks ago.

- 1) We were feeling the same anxiety – asking questions – “how could he be so stupid to do the same thing again”?
 - 2) The announcer gave us perspective.
- d) That is why it is so refreshing to hear Habakkuk crying out to God and to now God answered.
 - e) Habakkuk is taking the things that he fears and the things he can't understand and going to someone he trusts has a better perspective.

3. Be honest – the other option is pretending.

- a) If you are not honest with God and others you will start to pretend it is okay with you when it really isn't.
- b) You will invent a fake you.
- c) ILLUSTRATION: Carmella driving to Raleigh – **calling for directions(PIC)**
- d) You can't know how to get someplace until you know where you are.

4. Be honest – it is how faith is matured and failures are graciously forgiven

- a) If you don't stop pretending you will either drop out or you will relentlessly work to overcome or avoid whatever it is that prevents you from being honest.
- b) The name Habakkuk means “embrace”. It is a fitting name for this prophet. He did in fact experience a God who was willing to “embrace his questions and in doing so embrace him” – the man – the common prophet.