

Habakkuk 2:4 The Righteous will Live by Faith (part 2)

Today is the 2nd sermon the subject of faith from Hab. 2:4. Last week we looked at obvious truths about faith. Faith is in God. The Babylonians trusted in themselves. But Habakkuk trusted God. Then, we saw that faith is life. To have faith is to have life, particularly “eternal” life. And then, we considered the fact that faith is followed by works of obedience. This is probably the main thrust of Hab. 2:4. God was telling Habakkuk, SURE judgment is coming upon Israel and then upon Babylon. In the meantime, you live by faith. Trust me and live according to my commands. Today, I want to consider 2 more truths about faith from this verse and from the NT. And both of these truths are taught throughout the Bible. 1) To have faith is to be legally righteous before God; and 2) Faith finds its fulfillment in God’s promise to save. (Next week, we will look at faith as a “gift” and not a “work.”

1. To Have Faith Is to Be Legally Righteous Before God. Here we turn our attention to the word “just” or “righteous.” Now, the clear context is righteous living. The one who has faith is the one who lives godly, the one who is “faithful” to walk in obedience to God. And often the godly are called “righteous.” In Ps. 1:1-2 we read: **“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked . . . but his delight is in the law of the Lord.”** And then in v. 5 we read: **“Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”** From this perspective, God was saying to Habakkuk: *“The Babylonians are not righteous. They are a wicked people. They are proud idol worshippers doing evil deeds. But those with faith live differently in this world.”* The righteous will live by their faith.

However, this is only one side of the coin of faith. There is another side, a LEGAL side, a side of JUSTICE. This other side is one of LEGAL STANDING before God. Think about Israel’s legal relationship with God through his covenant. In Deut. 28:1 God says, **“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.”** (A list of blessings follow.) And then in v. 15 He also says, **“But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God, or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.”** (A list of curses follow.) These are the words of the JUDGE of all the earth. And Israel stands in the courtroom, knowing clearly what God commands of them. Habakkuk knows their ways; he knows they have legally broken God’s covenant. And he knows God will judge. Legally, He must do as He says. Therefore, Habakkuk knows the Babylonians are coming.

Let’s think about this differently. The governments of this world operate from the principle of justice. Think about it. And this is designed by God. Paul says in Rom. 13:2 **“Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”** Government is designed to be just, particularly in the curbing of evil. When someone kills someone there is prison and maybe the death penalty. When someone steals from you and is caught, there is retribution and punishment. If your neighbor destroys your property, there are laws that are meant to be just. And, for the most part, these laws and the corresponding punishments are written down as “laws.” And we know up front (for the most part) what the punishment will be. If you see a 55 Speed Limit Sign and you go 75 and get a speeding ticket

what happens. You get a court date (among fines etc.) where you have to appear before a judge. And he/she says, “*How do you plead?*” Well, you know your speedometer is right and you must say, “Yes, I am guilty.” And the judge says, “*Yes, legally your standing is guilty. Now go pay your fine.*” And we all know this is the “right” or “righteous” judgment.

Brothers and sisters, this is where the problem lies. We haven’t merely gotten a speeding ticket. Legally, all mankind stands as sinners, those who have broken God’s commands. Therefore, our legal standing before God is **GUILTY** as charged. Isaiah says, “**We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities**” (Is. 64:6-7). Think about your own life. Which of you has not sinned? Which of you has not broken the commands of God? Which of you have always told the truth? Which of you have always been content with what God has given you? Which of you has always obeyed your parents? Which of you has not thought evil of your neighbor? Men, which of you have always been true to your wife by not looking at another woman? Children, which of you have always loved your brother or sister and done good to them? This week, which of us have not rolled our eyes in impatience, or had an outburst of anger? Which of us have always loved God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and never put an idol before Him? . . . The Court of God’s Justice Declares ALL of us Guilty! As regards sin, this is our standing before God: Guilty As Charged!

But, somehow, those who have FAITH are counted as “righteous,” or “not guilty” before God. They have a right “standing” before God. The Apostle Paul says we are “justified by faith.” Listen to these words. Rom. 3:28: “**For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.**” Rom. 5:1: “**Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Gal. 2:16: “**yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.**” Gal. 3:24: “**So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.**”

How can this be? This is where the NT, especially Paul, picks up Hab. 2:4 and shows its fulfilment in the Gospel. And this is good news! Christ stood in your place! As Job considers his own sin before God, he looks forward and by faith says, “**For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth**” (Job 19:25). In the OT Israel was obedient to sacrifice day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. These animals were sacrificed for sins. But, they could never STAND in their place. “**For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins**” (10:4).

This is what separates real faith from the “faith” of the world. This is Paul’s question. How can a man, who is a sinner, be right before a holy God? How can God’s justice square with sinful men? Particularly in the OT, how can the blood of bulls and goats really PAY for sin. This is not enough! How can the judge of the universe declare someone “not guilty?” without sufficient payment, without full punishment for the crime committed? This is none other than the doctrine of justification by faith. The Apostle Paul teaches over and over again in his letters that a person

does not find a right standing with God merely by good works. (**think about transition here and any applications.**)

2. Faith finds its fulfilment in the promise of God to save. Think about Habakkuk. Throughout the entire Book, he is seeking God. He waits for God to answer concerning his judgment on Israel. And when he says, “*I will judge you with the Babylonians*” Habakkuk is deeply moved, wondering how God can do such a thing. Then, what does he do. He sits back and waits for further answers from God (2:1) And God says, “*The just will live by faith.*” In other words, “*I am on my throne. I am doing what is right and just with Israel, with the Babylonians, and with you. In the meantime, you trust in my promise not to break my covenant with Israel and in the end to save you and ALL who look to me to fulfill my promise.*” This is faith. It has always been this way.

Think back to the Garden of Eden. After Adam’s sin and fall, God comes to the man, the woman, and Satan with judgment. But, in this judgment there is a promise of salvation. God was saying, “*Yes, Adam, you and Eve, are guilty. Your legal standing is condemnation, sin and death.*” But, he says to the serpent, “**I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel**” (Gen. 3:15) This is God’s promise! He is saying, “*You are GUILTY. Your sin has fixed an insurmountable chasm between us. And you fall short of my glory. And you cannot overcome this! But, according to my mercy, I PROMISE to do something about this, and secure your salvation, something that ONLY I can do. Therefore, Adam, you and Eve, wait for my promise.*” And this is faith.

Now, I do not believe they knew exactly how this would happen. Though I do think it is clear that God will work through a man, one of Eve’s “offspring.” And even as the OT unfolds, God reveals more and more about his promise to send ONE born from a woman. Even as we’ve seen with Job (a very old book), He was waiting for God’s promise to send a redeemer. And in every book, we see shadows and glimpses as well as clear references to the fulfillment of this promise. From the sacrificial system, to the priests, to the appearances of the Angel of the Lord, to the words of the prophets speaking of ONE to come, God’s OT people of faith trust God’s promise. This was the great quandary of the Apostle Paul as he thought about OT believers. “*How can they be justified . . . How can they stand before God as SINNERS . . . if the blood of bulls and goats is not enough?*” Turn to Rom. 3:21. His answer is this: they looked forward to the promise of God in the Gospel of Christ. “**But NOW, the righteousness of God has been manifested . . .**” And then in v. 22: “**the righteousness of God through . . . FAITH in Jesus Christ for ALL who believe.**” And then in v. 23 “**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood . . .**” And what is this? This is the key to our standing. Christ does what ONLY God can do. As the perfect Son of God without Sin, he takes the judicial punishment we deserve upon himself as God’s wrath appeasing sacrifice. And how is it received? Let’s continue in v. 25: “**to be received by . . . FAITH. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has FAITH in Jesus.**”

This is why Paul says in 2 Cor. 1:18-20: **“As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.”** This means that today, if you believe this to be true, you are trusting in the promise of God to save you, and this, by faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Next week we will consider faith as a “gift” and not a work. But to finish today, let's end with some specific applications. Turn with me to Rom. 5:1. Today, as Christians, as those with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, our legal standing before God is “not guilty.” The blood of Christ has paid for our sins. And though sin still remains, there is now, no condemnation from God. As He loves Christ the Son, so He loves us, as we are found in Him. And, now we live by faith, trusting in God to fulfill all his promises to us in Christ.

Rom. 5:1: **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have . . . peace . . . with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** There is no greater peace than to know that God is no longer angry with you as a sinner. Christians have peace. When we lay our heads on our pillows at night, we are calm in the hands of God. His wrath is not upon us. It fell on Christ! Let's continue in v. 2: **“Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand”** This means we don't have to go to a priest or another mediator, but directly to the Father in the name of the Son. By faith, we pray and God answers. There is not a single second of our lives that we cannot approach the Father. If Christ is united with Him, and we are united with Christ, we are united to the Father, and this, by the Spirit. And then v. 2 continues: **“and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”** Here we rejoice in God's promise. Let me finish with vv. 3-11: **“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. 6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare to die—8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”**