

Hab. 1:5-2:4 A Recipe for Understanding (part 2): The Righteous Person will Live by Faith

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5-6). I’ve entitled these two sermons “A Recipe for Understanding,” and it seems to me as I read the Book, Habakkuk does not lean on his own understanding, but is a great example of one who obeys Prov. 3:5-6. Let’s recall for a moment. Habakkuk lives at the very end of Israel’s time as a sovereign nation. He lives after the fall of the Northern Kingdom as the Assyrians conquered them in 722 B.C. The Southern Kingdom is in serious decline, both morally and politically as Babylon is rising as the new superpower. And the Babylonians, according to Habakkuk’s understanding, nor God’s, are very moral. In cp. 1 we read, they are “a bitter, hasty, dreaded, feared, unjust, violent, . . . with great military might, doing as they please to the nations around them” (1:7-11). And God says to Habakkuk, I AM calling THEM . . . to judge Israel. I AM the ONE who will do this (v1:6). And Habakkuk doesn’t understand. So what does he do? From part 1 of this sermon: 1) He appeals to the character of God (vv. 12-13). And then, 2) He waits on God’s answer (2:1).

Today, we come to truth #3. It is this: FAITH. Look at 2:4b: **“but the righteous shall live by his faith.”** This is the **“TRUST IN THE Lord with all your heart”** of Prov. 3. Can you think of something we need more in this world than “faith” in the living God; especially when the consequences of sin (often our own) abound around us? Sickness, death, political turmoil, violence, moral decline, the shifting of powers in the world, etc. I cannot! Therefore, **“the just will live by his faith.”** Today, I want to give 3 foundational truths about faith from this text and spend a good bit on application. And then next week, I want to go further into the specifics of faith and how it comes to us as we look at how this verse from Habakkuk is quoted in the NT to teach the gospel. (So, you will have to hold on till next week to fill in some gaps I will leave out today.)

1. The object of faith is God. Here, I know I am stating the obvious. Faith is always in God, not in man, not in ourselves. We see this throughout the Book as Habakkuk contrasts the Babylonians, who trust in themselves, with those who trust in God. Look at v. 4: **“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him . . .”** And then in v. 5: **“Moreover, wine is a traitor an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples.”** Here we see the motivation of the Babylonians is self, while Habakkuk trusts in God. What does Prov. 3:5 say? **“Acknowledge HIM in all your ways.”** This seems to be the point of the entire Bible. In Mark 11:22 Jesus tells his listeners: **“Have faith in God.”** This is the essence of the first commandment: **“You shall have no other gods before me”** (Exod. 20:3). God will not give his glory to another!

In whom was the Babylonians’ “faith?” Who did they trust? Look back at 1:11: **“Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god.”** But God says: in Is. 42:8: **“I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.”** Beloved, the object of faith is God, and God alone. This means ALL our devotion, ALL our thoughts, ALL our aspirations in this life, ALL our hopes, ALL our dreams, ALL our heart is directed toward God who says to the earth, **“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other”** (Is. 45:22). This means that everyone who trusts in, or puts their “faith” in anyone or anything except God falls short of God’s glory.

And this is sin! And the consequences of this sin lead to death and destruction and separation from God; and on the way much heartache, much distress, and ultimate emptiness in this life and the life to come!

The Babylonians looked to their might. They trusted their strength in battle. They praised their riches and their intellect. In the same kind of way, the powers of this world do the same thing. Today, as we look around, this is what we see in our culture. We trust in our intellect. We trust in our political decisions to govern. We trust in our economy and our ability to produce over the years one of the wealthiest standing nations on earth. We trust in our military might. We trust in our ability to engineer infrastructure. We even trust in what we consider to be good works, as we give a lot of money to help the needy in the world. Yet, in all these things, we have tunnel vision, seeing very little. But those who trust in the Lord, see things clearly. When I became a Christian, the blinders came off. And the first thing I understood was this: *“In the beginning God . . . created the heavens and the earth”* (Gen. 1:1). He is the Lord! He is the Sovereign King. He is the ONE who gives understanding.

One application: To trust in God alone means we also obey Him, even when the world does not. At the end of the day, sinful mankind wants what we want, when we want it and how we want. And to submit to God’s ways, means we will, as Prov. 3:5-6 says, “acknowledge him in ALL ways.” This means we must change our ways, to line up with truth. For God is true. And these truths are found in the Word.

2. Faith is life. Look at 2:4 again. **“The righteous shall LIVE by his faith.”** We cannot miss this. It is not merely that we live in a certain way. We must go even deeper. Those who have faith . . . in God . . . have LIFE. And this isn’t merely to draw breath. The clear implication of this verse and this context is ETERNAL life. Yes, the Babylonians live. But, they will perish . . . one day. And yes, Habakkuk, you and your family will die, either sooner or later. I am not sure Habakkuk knew what would happen to him and his family when the Babylonians come. If it were me, I would assume death. Look at 3:16: **“I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.”** And then in 17-18: **“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 and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”** But God assures Habakkuk that He is the God of life. And to have faith in the living God is to have LIFE.

I believe God is saying, *“Habakkuk, the Babylonians are my vessel for judgment upon Israel for your sins against me . . . for breaking my covenant. But, a day is coming when I will judge the Babylonians for their sins as well. For the soul that sins will die. The wages of sin is death. But, YOU . . . live by faith . . . and you will LIVE.”* Brothers and sisters, faith is the opposite of death; and to have faith in God is to have eternal life. Therefore, faith is life. And this life comes from God. The OT teaches this principle. God says to Ezekiel **“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh”** (Ezek. 36:26). This is really the doctrine of regeneration. As Jesus says to Nicodemus, *“You must be born again”* (John 3:3).

Kids, how many of you like stuffed animals? Abby's favorite is a moose. Olivia's is probably some sloth. In the mornings sometimes, I use Moose to wake Abby up. I pretend Moose is talking with her. But, we all know Moose is not alive. I think that's one reason we like pets. They are living. Our dogs lick us and sit beside us and jump on us and depend on us. Our cats purr and rub up against us and play. They are alive. Well, the Bible teaches that as sinners we are spiritually dead. And we trace this truth back to the fall. Because of Adam's sin, which we also inherit in OUR nature, not only will we die physically, apart from faith, we are NOW dead. We are separated from our source of life. And such will we be for eternity if LIFE does not come our way. Think of a stone. It is dead. It does not move. You can pick it up and throw it, but it lay where it lands. It is dead. In the same way, without faith in the living God, we are like a rock. And this applies to both sinful Israel, the Babylonians, Habakkuk, and all of Adam's kin (us). "For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

Brothers and sisters, 2:4 may be the most important verse in the Book. This is God's answer to Habakkuk as he waits for understanding, as he waits for the coming judgment. Live by faith and you will live. We are the same! God is saying, judgment is coming. It is coming to this world. It is sure! And times now can be and will be almost unbearable! This week Kristen and I went to a funeral of a Christian family who lost their son; he died suddenly in his sleep. But, he was young man with faith. And as Habakkuk received comfort in these words, so we also must receive comfort knowing that though we die, yet we will live.

Do you remember the words of Jesus when his friend Lazarus died? And after 4 days Jesus went to the family, where he would eventually raise Lazarus from the dead. But before doing this, he has a conversation with Martha. He says, "**Your brother will rise again.**" Martha said to him, "**I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.**" Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?**" She said to him, "**Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.**" We will move to the specifics of the gospel next week and consider how Habakkuk looked forward to God's promise in Christ.

But, if we think about faith in God alone from our first truth, and know that God will not give his glory to another. Yet Jesus says, "**Believe in me and you will live.**" As we look back on the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and we read the words of Scripture, we know Jesus is God in the flesh. He is LIFE. "**For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever BELIEVES IN HIM will not perish, but have EVERLASTING LIFE**" (John 3:16). "**For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is ETERNAL LIFE in Christ Jesus our LORD**" (Rom. 6:23).

This is the Gospel. God gives himself (in essence) as the ONLY remedy for our problem of death. And this is the only way to do it. And it is the most beautiful plan to deliver the gift of faith to his people! Therefore, look unto Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the LIFE; No one comes to the Father, but through Him (John 14:6). "**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him**" (John 3:36). As Christians we are "living" stones. I love the words of Peter in 1 Pet. 2:4-6 (turn

there). **“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: **“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”** Brothers and sisters, God is the God who gives life, which is evidenced in FAITH. To have faith is to have life.**

3. **Faith produces works.** The emphasis of this text is “how” the person of faith lives. God is saying, “In everything that is going on, everything that is coming, this is how faith works itself out in this world.” The root of “faith” here is “steadfast.” In this text, God is steadfast; and the result is our steadfastness. God is faithful. And those who trust in him are also faithful. I think of 1 Cor. 15:58: **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord . . .”** (1 Cor. 15:58). The context of this verse is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus who conquered death. If his death was to accomplish our “righteousness,” then he must conquer death. “The righteous will “LIVE” by faith.” (truth #2 above). If God is the source of our righteousness and life here are the things that follow. “How then shall we live?” So, let me end with some general applications as to how faith is worked out.

Application: God is sovereign! We must begin with this truth, no matter what! You are not God. Your ways are not his ways. His ways are not your ways. We would all be dead if we had your way! This means we haven’t begun to scratch the surface of his ways in all the details. Nor do we know the details of his plan. But, we trust in God, knowing He is working things out for our good.

Application: Things do not happen by chance. As mysterious as it may seem, God controls and orders all things. The nations are as tools in the hand of God. Is. 45:7: **“I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.”** Lam. 3:38: **“Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?”**

Application: We must look by “faith” beyond our circumstances, knowing God is working ALL things for our good. I think of Abraham and all the OT saints who did not receive God’s promises in their life. Heb. 11:13-16 says: **“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”**

Application: Habakkuk “wrote” these things for all generations. God reveals himself through Words. And we have his FINAL words written in the Bible. Therefore, those who live by faith read, memorize, meditate, speak to others, etc.

Application: See Heb. 10:39. Ask, “How do you know if you are understanding the truths from Habakkuk and following his example?” “You do not shrink back, but persevere in faith.”)

Application: Patience is the character of those who wait by faith. We are a “waiting” people. Look at 3:16: **“I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet, I will quietly wait for the day of trouble.**

Application: Without faith, it is impossible to please God. I will close with Heb. 11:6 **“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him”** (Heb. 11:6). And what is faith? **“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”** (Heb. 11:1). Faith is the gift of God for now, in the absence of sight. And faith is the most beautiful gift of God (Eph. 2:8). And this faith finds its culmination in Christ. 2 Cor. 4:6: **“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”** Therefore, the righteous will live by faith.