

Some of the greatest words in the Bible were spoken by those whom we call the minor Prophets. Because they are often overlooked, I want to take a look at a few of them over the next few months, Amos, Jonah, Hosea, and Zachariah. Today I'm looking at the Book of Habakkuk. I preached from this Book a few weeks ago – *Revive Thy Work Oh Lord*. This is one of the books with many ponderous words and truths as he is known as, the *man who questioned God*. Many of you are familiar with Tennyson's charge of the Light Brigade. The Brigade fought in a Crimean War between England and Russia in 1854. Sadly, much of which the poem speaks of is not understood today, but it remains as a story of a series of sad blunders in that the British cavalry rolled directly into Russian crossfire.

Half a league, half of the, half a league on,
all in the valley of death rode the 600.
Forward the light brigade! Was there a man dismayed?
Not till the soldier knew, someone had blundered.
Theirs is not to make reply, their's not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die...
Into the valley of death rode the 600.

The phrase, *not to reason why – but to do and die*, is for some the statement of their spiritual devotion. Never question. Never ponder. Never call upon the counsels of God to review – *not to reason why – but to do and die*. However spiritually noble that may seem, it is likewise, spiritual nonsense. God gave Man minds to use. It is more than mere recall which makes us human beings. It is the ability to reason that makes Man the superior of God's creation. Are we to love God like some tape recorder – catching every word and transposing it into our souls? Our ability to reason makes our minds uniquely different from other animals. We can do more than just remember. While the gift to collect a series of memories is important, to reason and think through a problem is uniquely better. It is the capacity to reflect, to reason, to question, that makes us humans. We love God when we think deeply about His activity. We love Him not by simply recounting what He has done, but by reflecting upon what it means to us, and what it means in our present world. Habakkuk was not in league with Tennyson: *not to reason why – but to do and die*. This Old Testament prophet lived in a crossfire that was cutting his world down around him. In spite of his preaching, the people

did not turn to God. Wickedness was tearing everything around him into ruins. The prophet knew what King Zedekia had done to Jeremiah, and how God hadn't done anything to help the famed prophet out of the cistern into which he had been thrown. Habakkuk had not forgotten how the Scriptures had been cut to pieces with a knife and then burned in the King's fire. He remembered and did what most thinking souls do when life comes unglued. He cried out in anguish, *Lord, why? Why Lord?*

C1:v2 Habakkuk questions: *how long Lord must I call for help, but you do not listen? V.3: why do you tolerate wrong?* God breaks the silence and answers in verse 6, *I am raising up the Babylonians*. Habakkuk is stunned. In v.13, he says: *why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? How can you use the Babylonians when they are more wicked than the Jews which you are about to destroy?* To an anxious, confused and perhaps angry man, God answers. C3v.16, *the day of calamity will come, on the Babylonians*. They will get theirs in due season.

There are a great many number of questions with unclear answers. There are problems which our minds cannot understand or resolve. Today's lesson is an example, even God's people struggle with the unanswerable. The Christian life is not as simple and neat as some would like it to be. The problem is that we have too often reduced God to a too simplistic a term, having reduced Him to formulae of doctrines that do not really work. There are great spiritual principles which are constant and ultimately true, verities which never change, truths that stand for everyone at all times. To illustrate: the fact that God is true for everyone, anywhere, at any time that Christ died for sinners is another ultimate fact. Further, that all have sinned is well known to most, but is absolute in Scripture. They are saved by faith and faith alone, is more than the battle cry of the Reformation. It is a foundation of personal salvation. Some problems in life are personal and raise questions which shake our faith. For us they become a matter of life and death and we too cry out, *why Lord?* We struggle for answers and are restless with those who want to be simplistic or glib with us. As a pastor, I attempt to share suffering, but not with glib answers: why did my child or my husband or wife die? Why did God allow this accident which has made me a cripple? Why did I lose my job for no apparent reason? Why did my wife or husband leave me? Why did my child grow up this way? Why did my child run away or take drugs? The questions all end the same way, *why Lord? Why me? Where are you God in the middle of all this?* I have seen suffering such as it is wrapped up in these questions and have found the

hurt and pain too intense for any cheap or glib response. Cheap or glib answers only increase the suffering and we must remember Job's comforters did not die with Job.

What about the problem of sickness? Why are some people perennially ill? Why are some not healed though they are children of God and have prayed? I am aware that there are some people whose theology says quite clearly that anyone who believes in God is immediately healed. If so, why do they also die just like everyone else? I have seen people whose faith was shaken and shattered when taken to a healer and told, if you have a genuine faith you will be healed. These people prayed, but went away unhealed. It is too simple to say that they had no faith. Habakkuk would have asked, *why Lord?* Why are some greatly talented while others have so few gifts? Why do some have so much success while others seem to fail no matter how hard they try? It is altogether too easy to come up with nicely packaged answers. In the reality of life, clichés bring poor comfort. There are great uncertainties for which no clear concise answers are available. To these uncertainties we struggle for answers, hold them gently, and wait. Proverbs 3:5 – 6: says, *trust in the Lord with all thine heart: and lean not unto thine own understanding.* Unfortunately, it is the second phrase we dismiss all too easily, *lean not unto thine own understanding.* We struggle for answers, ask questions, but there are things we cannot understand. In such cases we hold tentative answers and say, this is possible. And then wait until God makes it plain. With all our questions, there are answers to problems we cannot answer. While answers may not resolve our questions, there are other answers which will enable us to live with triumph. These are principles which will sustain us when our minds reel with confusion and anguish.

God answered Habakkuk. C.2:v.4: lays down the first great principle: *God's people live by faith.* That my friends is the very foundation of our hope. Quoted over and over again in the New Testament, no one can discount that it is fundamental and important. When we cannot see, we trust God who can see. We live by faith, not faith in general, but faith in God. We believe we can trust God and that, that trust will never be betrayed.

Luther made, *living by faith*, the watchword of the Reformation. God told Habakkuk, Luther, and us when we cannot answer a question, just trust God. We trust God when the very foundations on which we rest, crumble. We believe that love is stronger than hate and the truth is ever right. We are committed to the fact

that forgiveness is better than bitterness and revenge. We believe that heaven is real and that's worth living for. All these: love, truth, heaven, cannot be seen, yet are real enough that we live them out and live for them. We believe in the things we cannot see as more real than the things we can see. Our faith is the substance of our living. Likewise, we have faith in Christ. That He is, that He will do exactly what He says He will do, and ultimately He will win. You see, God's people live by faith: God's first answer to Habakkuk, an answer to questions we cannot answer: C.2:4b: *the just shall live by faith*. C.2:v.14: the Scriptures declare that the day of God will come: the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as waters cover the sea.

God second answer is the final triumph of righteousness: that one day, God will reign and right will prevail. 6 million Jews went to the gas chambers during World War II. The tragedy was called Holocaust by the Jewish world - which is the Hebrew word for, *burnt offering*. The very word ultimately declared their faith in the living God, that God's day was coming. They where in their own words, *burnt unto Him* – Holocaust. The inspiration of God's Word to us today is what ever right or wrong, we as a worshiping community are feeling, *God's day is coming*. Ultimately no matter how long they rage the streets, God will win.

The third truth which will steady us when we have questions we cannot answer is C.2:v.20: *The Lord is in his holy temple: that all the earth keep silence before him*. Simply, *God is ever in charge*. Solomon knew that his temple would be a failure without God. He could build it, but unless God were enthroned in it, it would be a religious mausoleum. When God answered Solomon's prayer and settled in glory in the new house of worship, all Israel rejoiced that God was present and in power. That gave God's people confidence that prayer did profit, if He were in His holy temple. That is why we dedicate church grounds and buildings to the glory of God after this ancient tradition. Those of you who are Masons, Odd Fellows etc. know these rights in Scripture well. That is why Jesus had to clean the temple, but that is for another day. For Solomon, for Habakkuk and for us, when God is in His holy temple it means that the Lord is enthroned and rules in the affairs of Man. There are some answers that are approximate and must be held tentatively. It is then that *we lean not unto our own understanding*. We simply trust God and wait. But there are other answers which are solid answers when we ask, *why?* Answers which are absolute and on which we can anchor our souls. First, *the just shall live by faith*. Second, *righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea*. Third, *the Lord is in his holy temple, that all the earth keep silence*

before him. As human beings, many of you here have had the experience or perhaps you are going through the experience now when all of life seems to have come apart or unglued. Admit it all, call out your question, *why God?* God is neither angry nor unsettled by your questions. Don't cast Him aside because He doesn't send you a telegram in an instagram. There are great absolutes upon which you can rest: the greatest is that God is real, that He gave his Son to save us, that Christ died for us sinners.

In the midst of life's raging difficulties, turn to Christ who is mighty to save. God gave us His Son to declare that He cares, that He will come to us just as His Son came to us. In the midst of your hurts, let Him comfort you. If you have sinned, let Him forgive you. If God came to Habakkuk, the ancient prophet, He can and will come to you.

Amen.