

## Mysterious Ways

*Testing Positive: Finding Faith in Crisis: Pt.1*

Finding Faith in Crisis. I surely don't need to build the case that we are in crisis. The fact that I am here in church and you are not legally allowed to be here with me is a pretty strong exhibit A. And of course what started as a health crisis has dominoed into an economic crises, a mental health crisis, a social connection crisis. Money can be made again, but how can we get a do-over for milestones lost – birthdays, graduations, weddings, and funerals?

No, we're in a crisis, the real question is what tone do we take with this? You know, we live in this weird time of social shaming where an innocent online comment like, "Boy, I sure would like to go for a drive" is easily met with a reaction like, "WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO KILL MY NANA!" Even to say, "we must choose faith over fear" can be misunderstood in a number of directions. And I certainly don't want to fall in league with certain conspiracy theories out there. This is not a deliberate attack on religious freedom. My stock answer has been, "Listen, America worships money above all else. So at least the world has closed her *own* temples as she's asked Christians to close ours." At least they are being consistent.

So we're being playful with the graphics in this series – the COVID smiley face – but as you will see, we're putting that together with some very serious biblical content. Because at the risk of being misunderstood, we really *do* have to choose faith over fear. We really do need to put an eternal perspective over our current reality. The truth is, we're not the first Christians to have to find that balance. Not by a long shot.

How many times have you heard – or even said – "We've never seen anything like this before?" Well, that may be true if by "we", we mean the collective people listening to my voice at this moment. But that is certainly not true of the human race. The collective "we" of history has seen and survived this and worse. And as someone who is trained in historical theology, I think a proper understanding of the past is a vital component to healthy and responsible living in the present.

I've been reading an anthology of collected works by the accomplished American novelist and civil rights activist, James Baldwin. And I came across a quote a few days ago that I think is really important. In a 1963 article titled, *The Pain and Glory of Knowing Who You Are* – that's part of our current problem isn't it?; we're trapped with ourselves and it's impossible to self-distract from the knowledge of who we really are!

But he says this, “You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was [books that] Dostoevsky and Dickens who taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who ever had been alive.”

We’re not alone. We are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. We’re all in the story – different chapters perhaps – but the same story of humanity. And of course as Christians, there is one book in particular that we can look to for connection with our ancestors. And that book - the Bible - is full of reality checks and wake up calls. Look at **Ecclesiastes 9:12**, here’s a cheery thought, *“As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.”* Not new.

In the New Testament, Jesus said it directly, (**John 16:33**) *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble ...”* – but then he gives us some hope that the previous writer skips - *“But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* So, troubles are real, but faith – specifically faith in Jesus Christ is greater than our fear. So for the next few weeks, I want to offer a biblical perspective on finding faith in times of crisis – just like our spiritual ancestors have been doing for centuries past.

And we’re going to do it from a rather unusual book of the Bible. But it’s a perfect book for times of crisis. A couple of years ago during my doctoral sabbatical, we lived for a number of weeks in Great Britain and the morning we arrived in London – a Sunday morning – we went straight from the airport to church. A very special church to me. Westminster Chapel has been a leading church in London since 1865.

From 1939 to 1968 it was led by Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones – one of the greatest preachers who’s ever lived. And in 1950, the English people were just beginning to survey the results of the War. There were bombed out buildings all over town, everyone had lost loved ones, the economy was in shambles and the hot war hadn’t even cooled before the Cold War ramped up. And his people were asking, “Where is God in such evil times? Why has God abandoned us? Why is God letting all this happen?”

And Dr. Lloyd-Jones began to preach out of a little Old Testament book to answer the questions. The same book we’re going to turn to for the next five weeks – the book of Habakkuk. Because he said, “If you understand the book of Habakkuk, you never would have been surprised at what happened. You would have been ready.” And I agree with him.

Now, it would be possible to go to church for many decades and never hear a sermon on Habakkuk. Except if you've been around *here* very long, you already have. We looked at this material back in 2016 when there was so much tension in the air. And even back then, I said that I may be pulling it out prematurely. But if it was useful for *preparedness* then, I think it may be essential for *survival* now. So we're going to look at it again. Because you don't remember it anyway!

It's a short book in the Old Testament, just three chapters. We know almost nothing about Habakkuk himself. We don't even really know quite how to pronounce his name because it's an Akkadian loanword. So if somebody says to you, "Habakkuk..." And you say, "Well, my pastor says Habakkuk." That person says, "Ah, but that's an Akkadian loan word, and no one really knows how to pronounce it." You'll say, "Nerd!" and give them a wedgie and steal their lunch money. But they'd be right, of course. I am just going to say Habakkuk because you have to say something. But we won't make a federal case of it.

We're going to spend about five weeks going through this little book and here's the reason why; it's very, very contemporary in its application. Let's just look today at the first chapter. It's a back and forth between God and this prophet. It starts with Habakkuk talking to God about what he's seeing in the world – in his country of Judah.

And then God gives him an answer. And then Habakkuk tells God that he doesn't *like* God's answer. And then in Chapter two, God answers back, but just chapter one for today – Habakkuk-God-Habakuk.

So here's the first few verses, **Habakkuk 1:1-4**, he describes what he's seeing in the world around him, "*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.*"

"Why do you make me look at injustice?" - the word *injustice* there is a pretty general word. It means "evil" or "sorrow" or "grief" – basically the world the way it's not *supposed* to be. And what he is saying here is, "Why have you put me in a position where all I see is evil?" A little context; the good King Josiah, who was the ruler of Judah just *before* Habakkuk, gave people the hope that there might be good times coming for the country, but his sons were terrible kings. There was moral corruption and injustice *inside* the society - that's why Habakkuk says "*the law is paralyzed*". And there were military threats *outside* and political corruption from within, so what that adds up to is evil times.

There are good times, and there are evil times. Good times are when we think things are basically getting better and better. We might have a good year or a bad year, but essentially we assume that 10 or 20 years from now, we'll be better off; that our children's lives will be better than ours, that our investments basically will go up, that the value of our homes will basically go up. See? Things will basically get better and better.

From 1870 to 1910 in North America and in Europe, that's how everybody felt. Good times. "Things are going to get better and better. We might have a bad year, but basically things are on their way up." Then the first part of the twentieth century saw World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, the Holocaust...By the end of the 40s, thousands of people were starving to death every winter...in *Europe*, where we go on vacation now.

And during that period of time, *nobody* believed that things would be getting better and better. They wondered if it would ever happen again. Those were *evil times*, decade after decade of things *not* getting better, problem after problem, just taking it one day at a time. And then the sun came out again and the economy swung back up and the Cold War trickled out and everything was good again.

So where are we, now? It is certainly too soon to panic, but on the other hand, it would be silly for us, considering things have happened in the last few years to think that good times last forever. I don't think we're over the psychological effects of 9/11 and the never ending wars it resulted in yet. We're just a decade removed from a global recession that showed how fragile our mighty markets really can be. And now here we are, sheltered in place, wearing masks to HEB, with no idea what *tomorrow* holds, let alone next month. There's a real tension in the air.

The evil times are real and it's easy to see them once they've arrived – like Habakkuk did - but they're hard to predict. We are not to live in panic, but we are to be alert. Historically there are always cycles to human existence and it is foolish and naïve to assume we've ever passed the negative ones for good. So how do we prepare ourselves for that? Are you ready to, once more in times of crisis, show the world a Christian who is shaken but not stirred? Who is calm in the midst of the storm. How do we do that?

And I think the book of Habakkuk is a great textbook for the lesson. Because Habakkuk saw evil times, but what really eats at him is not only evil times, but that God is not seeming to do anything about them. He says, "Lord, why aren't you listening to me? Why aren't you doing anything? Why do you tolerate all this? Why do you let this happen? Why are you absent? Why have you abandoned us?"

And I think we can learn a few things from how Habakkuk responded. First of all, you need to see that he was bold and he was honest. I mean, these first four verses are pretty bold – “God, why do you do nothing?” But down in v. 12, he actually does something that is even more remarkable, but it doesn’t come out so much in the English. Let’s skip ahead for just a minute, **Habakkuk 1:12**, “*O Lord, are you not from everlasting?*” Which means eternal or infinite; “Are you not infinite?”

Now in English, that doesn’t come across as all that confrontational, but in Hebrew, it *is* because it’s a rhetorical question. And you know a rhetorical question is not a request for information. It’s a punishing statement. If your boss says, “What are you, an idiot?” They’re not really looking for a response.

And essentially, Habakkuk was saying something like this, “I thought you were infinite. You were supposed to be this great God, infinite, wise, everlasting...but you’re *not*.” He comes very close to saying that. I read a Hebrew scholar commenting on the use of this particular Hebrew word that’s translated, “Are you not?” here and he says, “Most of the 96 occurrences of this word in the Bible are in vigorous human arguments. Nothing, therefore, could have been more abrupt than the beginning of Habakkuk’s second

prayer in verse 12. There is nothing like it anywhere in the Bible. God is not being approached with courtesy and respect. Habakkuk is in absolute anguish.”

He is in pain and out of that pain he is openly and honestly questioning God directly. “Why are you letting evil and injustice reign in my nation? Why do you do nothing?” And God answers in verses 5–11. We’ll get back and look at it a little bit more in a few minutes, but here’s the gist of what he says. God says, “Have you heard of the Babylonians – you know, the most ruthless, bloodthirsty people the world has ever seen? I’m going to raise them up to sweep across the world, and they’re going to crush and conquer your country.” That’s God’s answer in a nutshell.

And Habakkuk says, “You call that an answer? I just complained, ‘Why are you letting evil and injustice reign?’ and your answer is, ‘Wait ‘til you see the evil and injustice I’m fixin’ to send! You ain’t seen nothing yet. I’m going to send *more* violence and oppression.” And Habakkuk is very close to saying, “Are you nuts?” I mean, when he says, “I thought you were supposed to be infinite and wise,” he has lost it. It’s over the top. It’s excessive, but he is bold. He is emotionally and intellectually honest. He is wrestling. He is challenging God.

But that's not all he's doing. Do you know what the other thing you see is? He's *praying*. Of course he is. That's what it means to talk to God you see. It's a little easier to see as the book goes on. We'll especially see it next week when he says, "I will now wait to see what God says to me," because after he prays once – the opening four verses we read - God answers him in verses 5–11. And then the chapter ends with Habakkuk praying again, and God answers him again in chapter 2. But here's the thing you need to realize.

On the one hand, Habakkuk is challenging God. He is asking questions. He is struggling with doubts. But on the other hand, he never even *hints* - the thought never even enters into his mind - that it's an option to walk away from God; to stop obeying God, to stop praying to God, to stop following God. It's not even an option! Do you know why? Because, yes, on the one hand he is saying, "God, I think you're contradicting yourself." Boy, that's bold!

But notice *how* he is dealing with it. He is not blogging about it. He is not tweeting about it. He is not even talking about it. He is *praying*. In fact, even in **v.12**, which we've said is probably the most insulting thing anybody says to God's face in the Bible, look *how* he addresses God, "***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.*" He is wrestling, he is challenging God...*but* he is wrestling and challenging *faithfully*.

Now, listen, I've been talking to people about God for years. I mean, that's my job. I'm a pastor. I'm always seeing how people treat God. And can I tell you, almost *nobody* treats God like this. On the one hand, you have people in traditional, religious communities who say, "Oh, you don't question. Don't ask that question!" I think they see God as this King you have to appease, and "You'd better not say anything or He'll wipe you out, because what's important is saying and acting and doing everything just right." So they would say of Habakkuk, "You don't question. You don't wrestle. You don't ask those questions."

On the other hand, modern people, especially in Austin, we have this enormous confidence in our human reason and in our perception. You know, ever since the Enlightenment, we have this *enormous* confidence in reason. And what *we* say is, "I don't see how God could be bringing anything good out of this. I don't see why God is allowing all this suffering and evil. Therefore, I'm not going to believe in Him." Probably the most common objection to God I hear nowadays.

So it's either be silent or walk away. Habakkuk does neither. *Neither!* Do you see? On the one hand, he is *so* honest, much more honest than traditional religiosity, not feeling like, "I have to bow and scrape, not do anything wrong." He is intellectually and emotionally, incredibly frank. He is challenging. On the other hand, he wouldn't even *think* of leaving, not in a million years. In fact, when he says, "my Holy One," I think this is what he is saying...

"I wouldn't be upset if I thought you *weren't* holy, but I know you are. I wouldn't be upset if I thought I could walk away, but I know I can't. Because if I can't figure out life *with* you, how in the world am I going to figure out life *without* you, on my own? Where else do I go? You have the words of eternal life. That's why I'm so upset. I'm upset, not because I think, 'Well, hey, I don't need this God.' No, you're my everything, but *where are you?*" See, this is not, "Don't question," nor is it, "I'm not going to believe in a God who does these things." Neither of those things at all!

You don't have, on the one hand, dishonest, legalistic *appeasing* of God. You don't have, on the other hand, honest, frank *rejecting* of God. You have unconditionally faithful wrestling. Unconditionally faithful wrestling! And I have to say over the years, that kind of person is very, very rare. Do you know why? Because it takes gospel grace to produce that person. It takes gospel grace to produce unconditional, faithful wrestling, and unconditional, faithful wrestling produces grace. Here's why.

There are a couple of places in the book of Psalms, like Psalm 88 and Psalm 39, that end with the psalmist saying, "Leave me alone." That's how it ends! There are places in Job – we did a series a few years ago on this, *When Life Sucks* - where Job says things just about as strongly as Habakkuk. There are places in Jeremiah where Jeremiah does the same sort of thing. They're really, really upset. They're angry. They're confused, just like Habakkuk is.

And Derek Kidner, a great commentator and OT scholar, says something about these prayers. He says these types of prayers in Scripture are a witness to God's understanding. God knows how we speak when we are desperate. Do you know why He doesn't smite Habakkuk, why He doesn't stop talking to Habakkuk? Do you know why He puts the prayer of Habakkuk in the Bible for us to read centuries later? Derek Kidner says God *preserves* these prayers.

Why would He do that? *Are we supposed* to pray like this? Do you want me to end the service each week with, "Dear God, what the hell?!" "Well no, we're not supposed to say things like that. No. I mean, we shouldn't be talking to God like that." Well, then what are they there for? God knows how we speak when we're desperate, and here's what He is saying about His people by including things like this in Scripture.

“I’ve remained their God not because they put on a happy face, because they don’t; not because they have perfect emotional self-control, because they don’t; not because they’re doing everything just right, because they’re not. I remain their God because of my grace, because my relationship to them is not based on their performance. It’s because of *my* unconditional, covenantal, committed love.”

The reason Habakkuk has the freedom to make these kinds of statements is because he knows something about the grace of God. See, if you know the grace of God, that’s what makes you an unconditionally faithful wrestler, because you know you can ask. You know your salvation is not based on doing everything right. Knowing the grace of God, on the one hand, gives you the freedom to ask the hard questions. On the other hand, knowing the grace of God convinces you there is no place but *with* God that you could possibly make it in life, so you never leave.

So unconditionally faithful wrestling proves - even though you’re not doing everything right - that God is a God of grace, *and* God’s grace makes you into an unconditionally faithful wrestler. And that’s how you deal with evil times. And that’s what Habakkuk has done. That’s what he is doing. We’ll see this more and more as we walk through the book. So that’s Habakkuk’s prayer, let’s end it on God’s answer.

We’ve alluded to it, but let’s read the actual text, **Habakkuk 1:5-11**, “*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.”*

Well, aren’t you glad you prayed, Habakkuk? Have your grandma needle point that verse on a pillow for you! What is this about? God tells him he’s not going to understand this - “I’m going to do something you won’t believe.” Habakkuk says, “Why all this injustice and violence? Where is your salvation?” God says, “I’m going to bring *more* injustice and more violence into your life. And *that’s* how I’m going to work my salvation in the world, and you’re not going to understand it.”



But *we* can understand it. Because we have a view that Habakkuk didn't have. We have a perspective. So I want you to see two things from this when God says, "Here's my answer but you're not going to get it. You're not going to understand." There are two things we should learn from this statement. And of course, again, this is a series, so I think this will get clearer if you stick with the series and hear the rest of them as well, but here's the start. First of all, what God is saying is, "Don't you dare judge me by your own timetables, your own time measurements, and your own calendars."

You see, Habakkuk is saying, "I don't understand. You said you were going to be bringing salvation out of Israel to the world, and yet Israel is turning into this corrupt, awful thing. Come on, God! Do something." And God says, "I *am* doing something. I'm going to raise up this terrible Babylonian Empire. They're going to come and conquer the Jews, and they're going to take them out into exile."

And Habakkuk says, "You call that an answer?" God says, "Yeah." And do you know what? We can see something Habakkuk couldn't see. If the Jews had *not* been taken off into exile, they never would have spread throughout the whole Roman Empire in synagogues. You know, after the exile, though a lot of them came back and they rebuilt Jerusalem, most Jews stayed in dispersion – the diaspora.

And therefore, in every city in the ancient world, you had synagogues. You had Jews and "God-fearers" - Gentiles who had been pagans who began to study God's Word and began to get interested in the God of Israel.

And when Christianity began to spread - and you can see this in the book of Acts, and historians will tell you this - the most receptive people in the entire world to the gospel in the very beginning of the Christian mission were not the pagans and not the Jews but these Gentile God-fearers, the people who were part of those synagogue communities. They embraced it, and it was *through them* Christianity spread throughout the world.

And here's the great irony. In the ancient world, evil was the norm – things like human sacrifice, violent public spectacles like the Coliseum, infanticide, and slavery itself - in the ancient world these were complete givens. *All* human societies did these things - outside of this little band of Jews. Because of the Law God gave to Moses, the Jews has a different moral code. And when the Babylonians came up and took the Jews off into exile, these Jews and their morality got spread all over the Empire. And then a bit later, the Greeks conquered the world, which made Greek language the *lingua franca* – just like English is today – and for the first time, you could write a book like, oh, I don't know...the Bible - and everybody in the world could understand it.

But the Greek's day passed as well and then the Romans rose up, and *they* conquered everybody. And because they were so dominant, they had the Pax Romana, there was world peace and they built all of these great roads, so now you could travel everywhere under relative safety. So because of the Roman conquest, you could *carry* a letter say from Jerusalem to Antioch to Ephesus to Rome, and everybody could *read* it - because of the Greek conquest - and there were people in all the great cities who *wanted* to read it - because they had been scattered there by the Babylonian conquest. In other words, if this succession of dominant world powers - the Babylonians to the Greeks to the Romans - hadn't arisen, Christianity never would have spread. That's history.

So there's the great irony. The violence of those conquering nations led to Christianity, which has made all nations less violent. Do you think Habakkuk could have seen that? Of course not. You know, when the Communists took over China in 1949, they kicked all of the Western missionaries out. I know some people who were children of missionaries and remember having to flee. In 1949, everybody was saying, "Why did God allow that to happen?" You know, the Habakkuk's of the world were saying, "Why is God abandoning China?"

You know, we white people think nobody can work without us. But because the Christian missionaries were kicked out, the Chinese took over their own Christianity. They made it indigenous. And as a result, it's one of the most vital, fast-growing Christian movements in the world. There are more Christians in China than there are in America – but that's only 12% of their population. Missiologists are predicting that at current rates of growth, there will be 300 million Chinese Christians by 2030. What's going to happen to the global church when there are more Christians in China than there are Americans in America?

I was in Singapore a couple of years ago to learn about their church planting strategies. I planted this church, 17 years ago, but we are terribly inferior to many of these Singapore churches when it comes to multiplication. One I visited has planted 4,000 churches in the last decade. Another planted 9,000! And we were at a conference table with one of these pastors who I was just in awe of – it was like sitting with one of the apostles from the Book of Acts. I felt like a nobody.

And then I asked him what role the Chinese churches had in church planting. And then he started acting like *he* was the idiot! "Oh, the Chinese churches are killing it! Nobody is planting churches around the Pacific Rim in the sheer numbers that they are. We long to be like the Chinese churches!"

We may be shocked to discover that God has a plan to expand His Kingdom that doesn't revolve around us! But nobody had that perspective in 1949 when the Communist takeover made it look like 100 years of missionary work was just going down the drain. Yet, we don't learn. Still we sit here and say, "I don't get it, God. When are you going to fix things? I want to know now." And God says, "Well, you can't."

In fact, it's almost comical, the exchange between God and Habakkuk in this first chapter. Habakkuk says, "Give me an answer to what you're doing!" And God says, "Well, I'll tell you, but you're not going to understand it." "I don't care; tell me what you're doing." "But you're not going to understand." TELL ME!" "Okay, here it is." "I don't get it." God's like a mother of toddlers, just like, *uh!*

Right? How many of you have or have had a 2-year-old child? Okay. Do you know why they're always screaming? Because they don't understand what you're doing. They want something to eat. They reach out for it. It's poison, or it's just too much sugar or something. They've got it; you take it away. Scream! Why? They don't understand.

Now, you can sit down and try to explain it to them – like God does here. "Okay, honey, you want an explanation? Let me tell you about the basics of nutrition." A 2-year-old is just not going to get it.

So what do you say? You say, "Sweetheart, you have to trust me." And then about five minutes later, you say, "Shut up! Just believe me, you eat that and you're going to *die!*"

Now here's what I want to know. Why is it the average person in Austin says, "I don't understand why God allows this evil and suffering. I don't understand why God...it doesn't make sense to *me*, and therefore I won't believe in Him"? Listen, if there *is* a God, logic would dictate that the distance between your mind and God's mind is vastly, infinitely greater than the distance between a 2-year-old mind and a parent's mind. In 30 years, that kid will *have* the parents mind. In 30 years, you will *not* have the mind of God. Yet you expect to understand everything God does?

To say, "God has to make sense," makes no sense. To say, "I have to understand God and it has to make sense what He is doing," *makes* no sense. In fact, that's worse than a 2-year-old, because in the end, the 2-year-olds *do* trust their parents. You're less mature than a 2-year-old if you walk away from God. And if you don't trust God, even though sometimes what He says doesn't make sense, you're going to die spiritually and maybe physically. Habakkuk should have listened to the music of U2, because "He moves in mysterious ways."

So that's what God *said* to Habakkuk, but let me show you what it *means*. When God said, "I am doing something in your day that you will not believe. I'm doing something out there in the nations that you will not believe. I'm going to be bringing justice out of injustice. I'm going to be bringing salvation out of violence and oppression. I know you don't understand it, but that's what I'm doing," what does that mean?

Years later, Paul in **Acts 13:38-39**, says this amazing statement. He is preaching the gospel. He is talking about Jesus, and he says, "*Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.*" That's the gospel, that through Jesus we can receive forgiveness of sin through the grace of God, not our own works and efforts. That's good news.

But look what he says next, have you seen this before? **V.40-41**, "*Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: "Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you."* Well, where have you heard that language before? Right here in our text for the morning. Paul quotes Habakkuk 1:5.

And Paul says God was talking about Jesus. You say, "Wait a minute. No, God was talking about the Babylonians." But see, what Paul is saying is the thing God said to Habakkuk, that principle that "I bring light out of darkness. I can bring, and I *do* bring, salvation and redemption out of injustice and wrong and evil and suffering," that principle finds its ultimate and supreme expression in Jesus Christ. Do you know why?

Because when God – in the person of Jesus - came into this world and went to the cross, he *took* the judgment we deserve. He didn't come in strength. He came in weakness. He didn't come in triumph. He came and experienced *absolute* injustice – his trial was a mockery of justice. He was tortured, and he suffered, and he died. Why? Because he is *holy*. See, Habakkuk says, "I don't understand why you put up with injustice, how you can bring salvation out of injustice if you're holy."

And God says, "On the cross, that's finally explained." Because on the cross, *because* he is holy, because he can't just forgive us, because our sin has to be *paid* for, because what we've done toward Him and toward each other has to be paid for – you don't just sweep a Holocaust under the rug, you don't just ignore 400 years of brutal slavery – and because He *is* a just God, He *experienced* judgment on the cross.

He paid our penalty. He took the judgment in himself. And so Jesus on the cross is the ultimate example of bringing salvation out of judgment...and therefore bringing light out of darkness...and therefore bringing redemption out of suffering and evil and difficulty.

And people were standing there in front of the cross, looking at Jesus, saying, "I don't see what good God could ever bring out of this." And of course, it was the *ultimate* good. And now *you* must look at your life, and you must look at your evil times, and you must look at what's going on in your life. And you say, "I don't understand what God could possibly be doing here." Of course you don't. Remember, children don't understand parents.

But here's the ultimate meaning: look at the cross...because on the cross, you actually have, in a way, the ultimate Habakkuk. Because Habakkuk is perplexed, Habakkuk is very confused, and he is angry. He is upset. He is wrestling with God, and he says, "Where are you God?" And yet he is faithful. And what have we just seen in our last sermon series? The ultimate Habakkuk was the one in the garden of Gethsemane who said, "Father, is there any way out of this? If it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

Jesus was so wrestling with God's ways that in the garden, he actually says, "Is there any way out of this?" And yet he also said, "Nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done." Unconditional faithful wrestling for *you*. And on the cross, what did Jesus say? "Where are you, God? Why have you left me?" And God was really gone because Jesus was taking our penalty. Do you know what that means? Jesus Christ was truly abandoned on the cross.

See, when Habakkuk or you or I say, "Lord, why have you abandoned us," the point is abandonment is not real. We may not understand it, but God *is* working. He is working in spite of the fact that we *don't* do things right, in spite of the fact we say the bad thing to Him, in spite of the fact we don't keep our cool, we don't keep our emotional self-control.

Why? Why is He still faithful to us? Because on the cross, Jesus really was abandoned. He got the abandonment we deserve so when you're in evil times, you only *feel* abandoned, but you're *not*. And if you know Jesus Christ was faithful - he bore all that weight, he was faithful, and he stuck to it for you in evil times when they came upon him - then when your evil times come upon you, you can say, "I know God is working somehow. I know God loves me. Therefore, I will be faithful and patient for him."

See, Jesus, in a sense, is saying to you, “When you look at my death and resurrection, you realize dark times can come upon a person. But that doesn’t mean God has abandoned you. Dark times can happen to people who don’t deserve it. That’s how it happened to me. But I want you to know there is a reason for everything God is doing. And someday you’ll know what it is. Until then, trust me. Believe in me. Look to me.”

Let’s do just that this morning as we pray...