

## Pride

### *Testing Positive: Finding Faith in Crisis: Pt.3*

We're looking at the book of Habakkuk because it's a little book in the Old Testament that tells us how to face times of crisis, whether they're times of your own individual crisis - because everyone goes through some bad times - or sometimes you have a society-wide crisis like we're facing today. And none of us know at this point, what the eventual trajectory is going to look like. The late nineteenth century in America, things got better and better. The early twentieth century saw decline; there were two World Wars, the Depression. The late twentieth century, things got better and better. And now...where are we going?

It would be naïve to say we aren't going into bad times. It would also be probably alarmist to paint it as the return of the 1930's. I heard someone on the radio predict, "I don't think handshake greetings will ever come back." Oh please. But the Bible wants to prepare Christians so that either way, we are ready. If you understand what the book of Habakkuk says, you'll be ready for anything. You won't freak out, whatever is on the news. And so we're taking just a few weeks during this pandemic to look at this fascinating little book that you may go your whole Christian life without hearing from again.

Now, in chapter one, we've seen the prophet take his complaint to God about all the violence and injustice going on in his nation. And God's answer was that He was going to let it get *even worse* by allowing the wicked Babylonian empire to wreck havoc on the land. And Habakkuk didn't like that answer and said so. So this week, in chapter 2, God responds with a critique of the Babylonian society.

And that's what we want...isn't it? When somebody does us wrong, we want our friends to sit around with us and say, "Why those dirty so-and-sos!" That feels good. And God here does indeed show the rottenness at the heart of the Babylonian culture and you can just hear Habakkuk saying, "Yeah!" But as God deconstructs what's wrong with the Babylonian culture, He actually gives us two very important principles for facing times of crisis wherever we are.

See, in order to deal with troubled times, you need something for your *head* and something for your *heart*. With your head, you need to understand the source of the crisis that's surrounding you. And with your heart, you need a comfort or a consolation to help you face the trouble. The head and the heart...that's what we're going to see this morning.

**First of all, this text gives us the head knowledge to understand the source of the crisis.** One of the common denominators you see in media during times of crisis, is everyone scrambles to find someone to blame. Who's to blame for the trouble? I mean, how many stories are you reading or hearing about this? And who's to blame probably depends on which media source you tune in to. This one doesn't care about our health. This one doesn't care about our liberties. This one doesn't care about the economy. This one is in the pocket of big oil. This one is in the pocket of big pharma.

I'm not saying there isn't a place for government accountability – there has to be if you're not going to wind up a third-world banana republic. But we're largely not mature enough at the moment to do it and it just devolves into a partisan blame game. There are two competing narratives out there. One side says the answer is, "We need *more* government regulation." and the other says, with equal passion, "We need *less* government regulation."

They're all trying to find different people to blame, to say, "*This* is the source of the crisis. This is the source of the collapse and what's gone wrong in our culture." The Bible doesn't let you do that. The Bible is nowhere near as simplistic, dare I say it, as *either* the Republicans or the Democrats. The Bible is an

equal opportunity offender. It says, "You want to know who's to blame? The human race. Do you vote with the human race? Then *you're* the problem." The Bible won't let anybody off the hook.

See the reason we want to play the **blame game** is so we don't have to take **responsibility**. As long as it's the other side's fault, I don't have to change *my* behavior. You see this so clearly with climate change. All this debate about how much of it is caused by human behavior. Who cares? If a giant asteroid is hurtling towards the earth, I don't want to debate what caused it, I want to send Bruce Willis and Ben Affleck up in a spaceship to destroy it!

Now, in our text this morning, God paints a picture of social unrest. And he says that, because of the Babylonian's greedy business practices, eventually the common folk are going to take to the streets with pitchforks and torches. You can read the whole text on your own, but it's a social justice anthem. The problem with that kind of thing is that everyone of us reads it like we're the *victims*, not the oppressors. So we think we're off the hook. I mean after all, the Babylonians are out there burning cities to the ground, killing and raping everybody. I haven't done that. Have you done that? No. So it's very easy for us to read this and think, "Oh yeah, these Babylonians. How awful! Those fat-cats, how greedy!"

But God won't let us off that easy. There are a couple of verses that bookend this passage - up in verse 5 at the beginning and down at verse 18 near the end - that show us the source of the evil - the root of it. And that affects us all. It's the reason why historically in uprisings, the oppressed eventually wind up being oppressors themselves - that's the pattern of human history. So you have to understand the source of all the evil - the source that leads to times of crisis. Got to wrap your head around this.

So look at **v.5** which says, "*He...*" - that's the Babylonian society - "*...is **arrogant** and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.*" And a few verses later, we are told what it is these people are greedy *for* - it's not money for money's sake, land for land's sake, it's all for *glory*.

Their arrogance - their **pride** - arises from a desperate need to clothe themselves with glory. This is what drives the human condition. Because God created us to find our value in Him, and by rejecting Him, it left us with a large void in the middle of our soul. And so ever since the **fall of humanity** in the Garden, we have been **striving for glory** - striving to prove that we have value.

Classic example comes from pop legend, Madonna's, very famous *Vanity Fair* interview back in the 80s. These are her own words, "I have an iron will, and all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy...I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being and then I get to another stage and think I'm mediocre and uninteresting...again and again. My drive in life is from a horrible fear of being mediocre. And that's always pushing me, pushing me. Because even though I've become somebody, I still have to prove that I'm *Somebody*. My struggle has never ended and probably never will."

Now, that is just like the Babylonians. The reason they were out burning down cities and the reason Madonna was frantically turning herself into a media *empire* - think about the ramifications of that term, "Sports Empire, Media Empire" - and the reason you and I do so much of what we do, even if it's preaching or whether it's singing or whether it's making money or whether it's moving ahead in your career or whether it's presenting a certain physical appearance...if you know your own heart, you'll know, to a great degree, it's because we're insecure. We're trying very, very hard to cover ourselves with honor. We want to feel beautiful. We want to feel loved. We want to feel significant. And that's why we're working so hard. And *that's* the source of the evil.

Lewis Smedes is a great Christian writer and he talks a lot about pride. And I don't mean, "I'm proud of my kid for working hard and getting good grades", this is the arrogance, the sin of pride – you know what keeps us from God is not sin, Jesus took care of sin at the Cross – what keeps us from God is pride. At the heart of the evil Babylonian culture and at the heart of every culture, at the heart of your life, is this issue.

Smedes says, "Pride in the religious sense is an arrogant refusal to let God be God. It is to grab God's status for one's self...Pride is turning down God's invitation to join the dance of life as a creature in his garden and wishing instead to be the Creator, independent, reliant on one's own resources."

"Pride is the grand illusion, the fantasy of fantasies, the cosmic put-on. The fantasy that we can make it as little gods leaves us empty at the center...we are attacked by the demons of fear and anxiety...So we learn to swagger, to bluff...We force other people to act as buttresses for the shaky ego that pride created by emptying our soul of God...Every new situation calls forth the question: 'What can I get out of this to support the need of my ego for power and applause?' Every time you meet a new person you say – unconsciously perhaps - 'How can this person contribute to my need to feel better than others?' All of this is because we are empty at the center." (Lewis B. Smedes, *Love Within Limits: Realizing Selfless Love in a Selfish World*, 34-35)

Do you see yourself in that? If you don't see yourself in that quote yet, just keep coming to church, please. If you're needy and you *need* acclaim and you *need* applause and you *need* people to tell you you're okay – and *all* of us do to some extent; again this is the human condition – when you are needy, then you're out there using people, you're not serving people.

You get into every relationship and you say, "I want to be with *these* people because they make me feel good about myself. I don't want to be with *those* people, because they make me feel bad about myself." You're *using* people, you're not serving people. And see, that pride, which is at the essence of every human heart apart from the intervention of God, is the source of all evil in the world. Even the wicked Babylonians. Do you see it in yourself?

So, the first source of the evil is pride – the "arrogance" we see in v.5. But there is another bookend **v.18-19**, shows us what goes hand in hand with pride is **idolatry**. "*Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, "Come to life!" Or to lifeless stone, "Wake up!" Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.*"

Now, when we think of idols, we tend to think of something like this. This is an honest-to-goodness fertility idol that I picked up in Tanzania. This is not a tourist trinket, this is the real deal. I told the missionary I wanted an idol and he knew a guy. People – real live people - have offered sacrifices to this in order to get pregnant. It's too bad you're not here in the room, I could pass it around. Some of you are at home coving your wives eyes just in case!

But that's primitive. We modern people don't have idols. Women don't turn motherhood into a symbol that proves their worth! Men don't look to sexual prowess as a means of demonstrating their glory! We're sophisticated. We don't ritualistically bring offerings to the gods of the harvest every fall – we have Black Friday! Listen, they may not be carved of wood or covered with gold, but we are *absolutely* as idolatrous as any society that has ever lived.

What is it in your life that you *have* to have? What is there that, if it is threatened, you fall apart? A relationship? Grades? Income? Physical appearance? Popularity? The title on your business card? Car? Clothes? Neighborhood? Reputation? You *have* to have it. It drives you like a master's whip. It's an idol!

And every culture, every society, everyone takes some good thing and makes it an ultimate thing, looks to some created thing to give to you and do for you what only God, the Creator, can give and do. That's idolatry and that creates seeds of destruction in *every* culture.

So for example, if you're part of a traditional culture - and some of you are, most of the world, Asia, Africa Latin America fits this - if you come from a culture in which family is the absolute, that's the idol. You know, "family means everything." In those cultures - we would call that conservative traditional culture - because family is an idol – a good thing, turned into an ultimate thing - that leads to a certain kind of evil. That leads to honor killings. It leads to women as property. It leads to killing gay people just because they're gay.

But if you come to our Western American culture, which is highly individualistic, what really matters is *individual* freedom, individual rights. *That's* the ultimate, that's the absolute, and therefore an idol. And what do you have in that kind of society? You have sex outside of marriage. You have family deterioration. You have abortion. I want you to know that both of these cultures...are the same.

Let me show you. If you look at **v.17** it talks about environmental sin, “*The violence you have done to Lebanon...*” - which is the forests - “*...will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed man’s blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.*” Destroying lands and animals – environmental sin. Then in **v.15**, it says, “*Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.*” Which is a euphemism, by the way, for having sex with them.

Now blue people say, “Harming the environment is a sin!” And red people say, “Sex outside of marriage is a sin!” But only the Bible says it’s *all* a sin. Because see, conservative cultures and liberal cultures have their own sets of sins, but because they’re based on idols - because they’re based on making moral goodness and family the *ultimate* instead of God and His grace...or making individual freedom and fulfillment the *ultimate* instead of God and His grace - *every* culture has within it idols and, therefore, the seeds of destruction.

And that’s the reason why - and this is the first point, what we must understand with our head, and it’s very, very important – whenever times of crisis show up, everybody wants to find a scapegoat. Everybody wants to blame somebody. Everybody wants to say,

“Those evil people over there are the ones who are bad. Something is wrong with this country, we can feel it. It’s the Republicans. It’s the Democrats. It’s the immigrants. It’s the 1%.” But the Bible says if you understand your own pride and your own heart and if you understand that *every single culture* - whether it’s liberal or conservative, whether it’s capitalist or socialist, whether it’s traditional or individualistic - has within it idols and seeds of destruction, if you understand that then you cannot play that game.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1970 for his famous book *The Gulag Archipelago*. He writes about the eight years he spent in a Soviet concentration camp and all the torture and abuse that went along with it. He was later exiled from the USSR for publishing this book – returning to Russia after the fall of Communism until his death in 2008. In addition to be a fantastic writer, he was also a devout Christian. And his faith comes through in his works, even this one.

Just when you think he, in his book, is about to talk about how horrible the Communists are, here’s what he says, (p.75) “So let the reader who expects this book to be a political exposé slam its covers closed right now. If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing

evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. **But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.**” That’s a very famous line from the book. Listen to this, “Confronted by the pit into which we are about to toss those who have done us harm, we halt, stricken dumb: it is after all only because of the way things worked out that they were the executioners and we weren’t.”

Now that is a *profoundly* Christian understanding of things. He says the line between good and evil – pride – it comes from *every* human heart, idolatry is at the root of *every* human culture - in every culture, some things are idolized and some things demonized. But Christianity says our problem is *prideful sin*. Do you want to know the source of evil in every crisis time? It’s me! It’s you! It’s your own heart. And it’s infecting *every* culture. It’s infecting *every* person. And for you to start saying, “*Those* are the bad people and if we could just get rid of those people...” you’re part of the problem and not part of the solution. Part of the solution is humility and repentance.

It’s amazing what Solzhenitsyn said. He says when you’re about to throw your executioners into a pit because of what they’ve done, if you’re a Christian, you understand - if you have a Christian worldview -

you realize you have *all* the seeds in your own heart to be what those people were. It’s only the grace of God that *you’re* not an executioner. Do you *get* that? Do you understand that? How *crucial* it is when you’re in times of crisis not to find the perpetrators and say, “They’re the horrible people! Off with their heads!” That’s the Babylonian way. Don’t you do that.

In Germany, everything was going wrong in the 1920s in German culture. If they had said, “Ah, the line between good and evil goes down the middle of every human heart. Ah! Okay, no matter what culture, there are seeds of evil. No matter what the human being, there’s pride...” No, instead they heard the Nazis say, “The Jews are doing it. The capitalists are doing it. *There’s* the problem.” And, looking for a shortcut, they put the Nazis into power, and the rest is history.

Do you know how dangerous it is *not* to have a Christian view of things when it comes to politics? Here we are in an election year again. Yay! 2016 really split apart our church. We can’t stand another round of that in 2020. Just know, the line between good and evil goes down the middle of every human heart and therefore every political party. As Christians it is especially imperative that we get this. Our gospel is *so* much more important than our politics.

How are we demonstrating that to the world? You know, I've had people tell me, "Oh, if you believe you have God's absolute truth, you're going to be an oppressive person. You're going to be divisive; someone who rigidly divides the world into good and evil." And I always say it depends on what you think the absolute truth of God *is*. And if it's the gospel - and it *is* the gospel - then you'll know the problem is sin and the answer is grace. Not, "The problem is those people, and the answer is these people." That's what we need to get into our head.

**Okay, secondly, you need a comfort for your heart if you're going to face times of crisis.** Understanding for the head, comfort for the heart. And there are two *wonderful* verses in the midst of *all* this darkness – this is a very dark chapter - *death* and *judgment* and *wrath* and *bloodshed*. Then all of a sudden in verse 14 and in verse 20, there are these flashes of light in the darkness. They are so striking, that some scholars have questioned whether they belong in the text or if they were later additions. But I think that is foolishly shortsighted and totally misses the point.

This is what good stories do – and the Bible is a *great* story. Our Netflix account is really confused – it's suggestions for us to watch are really bi-polar. If you saw it you'd be like, "Who lives here?" Deanna likes lighthearted romances. A weekend ago she binge-watched an entire season of a Korean soap-opera. I watched an 8-episode Stephen King series about a demon-possessed serial killer! I like dark.

But I don't mean nihilism; there has to be at least a *glimmer* of hope – just enough light in the darkness to know there's a way out. I love that. And that's what's happening in these verses. It's sort of like a flash in the darkness. And I believe this is how hope works. That if you understand the hope in these two verses, even in your darkness you can face anything.

Let's look at the second one first. The penultimate hope you have in all troubled times is **v.20**. It's the sovereignty of God. "*But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.*" What is that saying? What it's saying is, no matter how bad things are, God is in control. He is sovereign. He is not gone. He is in charge. No matter how chaotic everything is, God says, "I am still in charge!"

Do you know the story of Jacob? God famously refers to Himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" – the big three. Jacob's name was later changed to Israel and the whole nation was named after him. It was to be through Jacob that the Messiah - Jesus Christ - was to come into the world, through his genetic line. But boy, did Jacob screw up his life. He lied to his father, Isaac, remember, by trying to dress up like his brother Esau so he could steal the birthright. And when Esau found out about it, he wanted to kill him. Jacob had to flee for his life. He *never* saw his mother again. He *never* saw his father again. He *lost* his inheritance. He was in exile for years and years and years.



And even then, on the run, he continued to lie and manipulate. He got swindled into marrying two sisters. What a mess! And *yet*...without all that, he never would have met the woman he married through whom the Messiah came, Jesus Christ. Would you say Jacob's life was on Plan B? Well I don't think Jesus Christ is Plan B. "Oh, well then it's all right then that he lied and he screwed up and he did all that." Of course not! Not at all. He made a mess of his life. He never should have done it, but don't you see what was going on?

*"But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."* What does that mean? On the one hand, you can really screw up your life. Your decisions do count. Young people, you are planting seeds that will determine the rest of your life. You're responsible for them...and *yet* God says, "I have a plan, and I'm going to overrule all evil, all bad choices. I'm going to have *my* purposes for you, and for the world, fulfilled."

Now this is what some theologians have called an *an-tin-o-mē*. Do you know what an antinomy is? A paradox is a contradiction, but an **antinomy** is an *apparent contradiction*. It just *looks* like a contradiction when you compare two seemingly incongruous things, but if they are both equally true and reasonable, that's an antinomy.

A classic antinomy is light. Sometimes it acts as a wave, sometimes as a particle – and those aren't the same things, so how can light be both wave and particle? We don't know. It's an antinomy – an apparent contradiction.

Apply it theologically. God says, "I am completely in control. Everything that happens is only according to my will. *And yet* every single person who is doing my will is responsible for what they do. Their choices count. They're not puppets." See, we have a tendency to say, "If God is in control of everything, then we're just puppets - we can't help what we're doing." *Or* we think, "If my decisions count, then it's possible for us to kind of mess up history and mess up God's plan."

That's just not true. God could *never* look down at you and say, "Oh, look at Anthony, gee, I wanted this and that for him, and then he went and did this. Now what do I do?" Is there any place in the Bible that ever depicts God like that? No. What God is saying is, "You are absolutely free *and* responsible for your choices at the same time. And because of some of those choices there are *terrible* things that are going to happen. *Bad* things are going to happen...and yet I'm overruling it all. I am in charge."

And that's the first gleam of light in your darkness. God never leaves His throne. God is always there. God is always controlling everything. But the second gleam and, frankly, the more ultimate hope, is **v.14**, "*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*" I want you to know, everybody, the reason why we are empty inside, the reason why we use people to bolster our self-image, the reason why we're trying to sell hit records or be excellent or make money is because we're hungry for glory. Remember?

You know, the Babylonians were hungry for glory. They were trying to get honor. Well, the only glory that really, really, really can satisfy your heart is the beauty of God, the honor of God, the applause of God, the love of God. You know, as Madonna said, when everybody is on their feet applauding for the incredible performance, *briefly* you feel special, but it's *brief*...because what you're really looking for is the glory of God, the honor of God, the love of God.

And this tells us someday you will bathe in it. You will *wear* it. You'll breathe it. You say, "How in the world can that be?" Here's how it can be. Look at **v. 16**, "*You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed. The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory.*"

Who is he talking to? The Babylonians. Why? Because in their prideful quest for glory, they've been using people. We said instead of serving people, pride makes us use people - we use them to get glory, to feel good about ourselves, to bolster our ego, to bolster our self-esteem. We use them.

And therefore, we deserve shame. We deserve the *opposite* of what we're looking for. We're looking for honor and glory, but we deserve shame and disgrace. And what we deserve is the cup of God's wrath. Drink the cup of God's wrath. You deserve disgrace. You deserve shame. I do. We all do. But verse 16 cannot be read by a Christian without thinking of somebody else.

**Philippians 2:7-8** says that Jesus Christ was not obsessed with his glory, "*rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!*"

And **Hebrews 12:2**, says the key to the Christian life is "*...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" The most humiliating, disgraceful, shameful execution possible was crucifixion – the cross - but Jesus Christ willingly drank the cup of God's wrath.

Do you remember from just a few weeks ago what Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane the night before his death? (**Luke 22:42**) “*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.*” What cup? The same cup we see here in Habakkuk. What does that mean? Jesus Christ emptied himself of his glory. The Babylonians - and you and I - tried desperately to *cover* ourselves with glory. Jesus *emptied* himself of his glory, lived a life of *servicing* others, not using others, but at the end of his life, he took our shame. He took the shame we deserve so that when you believe in Jesus Christ, the Father clothes you in the honor Jesus deserved. We seek our own **honor** and, therefore, deserve **shame**, but Jesus Christ took our shame so we could have his **honor**. When you understand that, it will transform you.

If you study the history of the Christian missionary movement in Korea, you make an interesting discovery. In the early part of the 20th century when the great revivals began in Korea that made Korea go from like a less than 1% Christian country to around 40% today - there were these powerful revivals between 1905 and 1907. And a very interesting part of those early revival meetings, was how often Korean men and women who had been converted were willing to confess sins publicly.

This is, in fact, a mark of revival all around the world – repentance breaks out. And likewise the Koreans were repenting and confessing all kinds of sins...*publicly*. Now, what made this really unusual is – and some of you know this very much firsthand - the Korean culture is a shame and honor culture. What matters more than anything else is that you bring *honor* to your family and your people, not *shame* to your family and your people.

And the worst thing in the world is to be shamed. The worst thing in the world is to lose face. But the reason why in those early revival meetings people were able to repent *publicly* and not be afraid of losing face was because they had been liberated from their culture, because they realized that on the cross Jesus Christ took their shame and now they were clothed in his honor. And now they could admit when they were wrong. They could admit *publicly* when they were wrong. They were freed from the idolatries of their culture just like *you* can be freed from the idolatries of *your* culture.

When you say, “Father, accept me because of what Jesus has done,” to know that *at that moment* we are clothed in his beauty and in his righteousness and his glory so the Father sees us as beautiful, we’re no longer struggling to *win* at all costs. We’re no longer struggling to *achieve* at all costs. And we don’t have to use people. We can serve people. And now we’re part of the solution, not the problem, in every culture.

When crisis times come, people get cynical and angry, and they blame others and they lose hope. But Christians are the *opposite!* We should be humble and be willing to admit our part in what’s wrong...and we should have all the hope in the world...because the gospel humbles us out of our pride...but in such a way that we have more confidence than we had before.

Have hope. Have humility...by remembering this, no matter how bad your circumstances get, and no matter how much blame you deserve for it – however troubled the times, they won’t stay that way forever. “*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*”

Let’s pray...