Watch and Be Utterly Amazed

Habakkuk 1:1-17

Key verse 1:5 **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.**

I thank God that we have a chance to study the book of Habakkuk. May God enlarge and deepen our faith through this book. This book was probably written in 605 BC, during the reign of King Jehoiakim, the last king of Judah. The book of Jeremiah is a good reference for understanding this book deeper. This book consists of the interactive Q&A between God and Habakkuk and it closes with Habakkuk's prayer and praise.

This book teaches us about God's sovereignty and his divine plan of redemption that goes far beyond our perspective and expectation. Similar to Habakkuk’s time, we live in an unjust and wicked time that God's final judgment will come soon. At this time, Habakkuk teaches us what we should pray for and what kind of faith we should live with.

Look at verse 1. **The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.** Here ‘oracle’ in the original text is ‘**burden'**, meaning this prophecy must be taken seriously because it will be fulfilled. This word is also a heavy message that must be proclaimed by the messenger. The name ‘Habakkuk’ means 1) ‘to embrace’, and 2) ‘to wrestle with’. In this book, Habakkuk embraces Judah's problems and her fate and wrestles with God in prayer.

Today's passage contains Habakkuk's first question and the Lord's response. What is Habakkuk’s question to God? Look at verses 2-3a. **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?**Habakkuk asks several questions to God. In his questions, we can see his complaints and frustrations. His question also reveals the serious condition of Judah, which was dying spiritually at the time.

What is the problem of Judah that Habakkuk is experiencing? Let’s read 3b-4. **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.** Habakkuk was living in Jerusalem in the late seventh century B.C. when the Babylonian empire was taking power in the ancient Middle East. His nation Judah had just experienced a spiritual reformation under King Josiah(2 Ki 22-23). However, His son King Jehoiakim did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He relied on Egypt and exploited his people to support Egypt. The worst thing is that he has forsaken the Word of God. On one occasion he burned the Scriptures when the Prophet read the Word of God. He did not listen to God. He did not fear God. (Jer36:21-25) In Jeremiah 23, God pointed out the sins of the prophets of Judah. They were supposed to deliver the message of repentance and God’s imminent judgment, they only spoke the words that were pleasing to the king and made false prophecies to the people, saying **‘The Lord says: You will have peace.’** **‘No harm will come to you.’(**Jer23:**16-19)**Under the reign of this evil king and false prophets, people in Judah were suffering from destruction, violence, strife and conflict, injustice, and wickedness. God's law was paralyzed, that is, it didn’t work at all, and as the law did not work, injustice prevailed, and the wicked who took advantage of injustice reigned over and oppressed the righteous who kept God's law. (1:3-4) These are the signs the prophet Habakkuk saw in anguish.

Habakkuk has pleaded for God's help and his salvation for a long time. But it seems no answer from God. Why doesn't God show any action? Does God hear the prayers of the righteous? He cries out in frustration and desperation. Habakkuk's questions are our questions as children of God who live in a perverted world.

When Habakkuk was full of complaints in the middle of his desperate circumstances, God responded to his prayers. Look at verses 5-6. **5 "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.** What does God's answer tell us?

First, God hears the prayers of the righteous and has been doing his work. God ordered Habakkuk to **look at all nations and watch** the work that God was going to do in his days. God was not indifferent to his people’s cries. God did not close his ears to Habakkuk’s prayers. God has not abandoned his salvation plan. Rather, God was already at work to carry out His redemptive work, but his work will be unbelievably and amazingly heart-breaking.

Second, God's plan may differ from our expectations. Let’s look at verse 6 again. **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.**The Lord tells Habakkuk his unbelievable plan. God was raising up the Babylonians to take care of the problems Habakkuk saw but in the way of harsh judgment. Babylon will sweep not only Judah but the whole earth like a flood sweeps everything. It is God's plan that cannot but be amazed. This plan of God implies that Judah's sin is more serious than Habakkuk's diagnosis of Judah as if due to a deadly virus, you have to reset your computer to factory settings. The sins of neighboring countries were also to the melting point where they could no longer be overlooked. Therefore, God will raise up Babylon and utterly sweep the nations.

God doesn't work the way we expect it to. Sometimes God works differently than we think. Sometimes it crushes our inmost hearts. God uses paradoxical ways to accomplish His will. God uses war instead of peace and the wicked instead of the righteous. God uses those who are worse than his people as an instrument to judge the wickedness of his people or to purify his people.

Let's look at verses 7-11.**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."**Then God describes the Babylonians. He calls them ruthless and impetuous, which means acting quickly without thought or care. They are a fierce and dreadedpeople. They will conquer the nations and gather captives, just as the desert wind gathers a pile of sand to form a dune. Their horses are faster than leopards and they are fiercer than wolves in the evening. Their cavalry gallops headlong. They are as swift as vultures preying on their prey. They despise and ridicule the kings of other nations and easily conquer strong cities. They had no god but were confident in their strength. They consider their power to be their god. God said he was the one who was raising them up. This would be God’s plan for the nation of Judah that Habakkuk had never expected. This was God’s plan for all the evil in Judah.

The problem of Judah, which Habakkuk saw and lamented, is the same in this world today. We are witnessing wars, destruction, violence, fighting, and conflicts everywhere. We see money rules over justice so Justice is perverted. The wicked prospers. God’s law had been paralyzed a long ago. We question, why doesn’t God do anything? Why is the Lord silent? But today, even complaining like this would be better than nothing, because most Christians are so busy surviving in the world, that they have no time to look at these issues, no time to be angry, and no time to embrace them and wrestle with God in prayers. We see the same things Habakkuk lamented, but we are indifferent, we are not amazed, and we do not cry out to God in prayers. God says, Look at the nations and watch-be utterly amazed!

Here are my questions. But is it all that we see and hear in the news? If God judges all those who do evil and corrupt people now, would the world become just and righteous? On the other hand, if God had not been silent and had done a terrifying thing, the world would have already been punished by thousands of flood and fire judgments. Even though God knows everything, He is patient and wants one person after another to repent and be saved **(Jn3:16) for God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son, Christ Jesus, for us sinners not to perish but have eternal life by believing in Jesus who was judged and punished by God on our behalf.**

God wants us to look at everything again and watch what he is going to do through his eyes. Look at me. Look at my family, look at campus, Toronto city and Canada, and the nations. We pray for the kingdom of God to come wherever we see it. However, the world we live in seems to have been polluted by overflowing sins. The problem seems to get worse. God's final judgment is unavoidable. It is just like Judah, where God’s judgment was imminent. In it, we live. Our reality is not much different from that of Habakkuk. Rather more serious. What should we do? Do we have to complain and ask God why you leave injustice and wickedness? No. God says in verses 5, 5 "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. We cry out and pray for this campus to be evangelized, for Toronto to become a holy city, and for Canada to become a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation. What is certain from today's passage is that God sees, hears, knows everything, and hears the prayers of the righteous in Christ and he is working even now. Instead of punishing the wicked and removing injustice, God works through the gospel of Christ so that each person one by one can repent and be saved from sin, death, and final judgment. I pray that we may have spiritual eyes to see that God is doing amazing things for his redemptive work.

Last week at CSBC, we heard and saw the Kingdom of God coming into the lives of our brothers and sisters through the gospel. This is a miracle. Impossible things with human power became possible with God's power. It is a miracle that Brother Kane wandered in the darkness, searching for the meaning of life, and then he met Jesus, the light of life, and follows Jesus. We saw the amazing work of God in which Shepherd Daniel returned to the Lord after long wandering and he found restoration and comfort in Jesus. God is answering the prayers of the righteous and accomplishing the amazing work of salvation. We are and will be amazed as we watch his unbelievable work. We pray that we may be amazed at God’s work of salvation and discipleship that God will accomplish through us.

How did Habakkuk react when he heard God's plan? Let’s look at verses 12-13a. **12 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. 13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.**In this part, we see a different reaction between the prophet Habakkuk and Jonah. In common, the two prophets were good at catching the heart of God. When God’s plan didn't match Jonah’s expectations, he could not accept God’s word, but disobeyed it, later he repented of it. Here Habakkuk however surrenders to God. Although God plans to appoint the Babylonians to punish Judah, Habakkuk accepts it as God's will. Who is God? He calls the Lord My God, my Holy One, and my Rock. The God whom he believes is holy One and everlasting God. He is set apart from evil. He punishes the wicked. Even though the judgment is executed, God will spare the righteous from death because He is the Lord of life.

Interestingly, Habakkuk does not stop asking questions. Look at verses 13b-17. **Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? 14 You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler. 15 The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad. 16 Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food.17 Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?**He refers to the three practices of the wicked: swallowing up those more righteous than themselves, their sacrifice to idols, and their mercilessness, as a result, they prosper. This is against God's righteousness, holiness, and mercy. Why do you tolerate this?**(chapter 2)**After this question, hedecided to wait on God's answer through prayer. Habakkuk, after honestly communicating his concerns and questions, stepped away from the turbulence of his own heart. He went to the ramparts where he could stay alone to hear God's voice. He was ready to listen to what God would say to him and obey it. He poured out his heart to God waiting on God’s response through prayer. **Psalm 73:16-17 says, “When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny”**. Habakkuk approached God in a deep, personal relationship with Him, God’s answers overwhelmed him, and he could understand God's plan. We need to approach our God closely with all our problems and listen to God's voice quietly and patiently. Our God will be pleased with our prayers and respond to us with his words.

**In conclusion,** we heard the prophet’s complaints and anguish, but he embraced it and wrestled with God in prayers. We knew that God hears the prayers of the righteous and he does amazing works for his redemptive history. God says, look at the nations and watch- be utterly amazed by his works. I pray that we may look at all things from God’s perspective and watch his amazing works and participate in God's redemptive history.