

## “Mind = Blown” Habakkuk Series

### 2: “Waiting Faithfully” / May 31, 2020

**Key Texts:** Habakkuk 2.1-4

**Key Words:** Watchtower, Guard post, Wait, Faithfully, Patient, Marshmallow Experiment, Humility, Obedience, Righteous, Faith, Trust

**Summary:** Sometimes as Jesus-followers we have to “wait on God.” What does that mean? And do you know the difference between just waiting impatiently, and waiting faithfully?

So, we reopened for in-person worship last week ... it was a great worship service! Most people who know me think I’m way too ornery to cry. But guys, I actually got a little teary eyed last week. It was so powerful when a significant chunk of this church family got together again in this room to honor our God. And then I messed it all up by getting up here and starting a little series on an obscure Old Testament book called “Habakkuk.” On purpose! That was kind of weird, right! On the other hand, we kind of discovered that it is a remarkably contemporary little book. 2600 years ago Habakkuk was asking the same kind of questions a lot of us ask ... because it was a weird time in Israel ... kind of like right here, right now. And the answers God gave to Habakkuk might be the answers we need to hear ... though we might not like them.

Anyway, this Habakkuk was a prophet, which means that sometimes God spoke to him somehow. Sometimes God gave him messages he was supposed to pass on to God’s people. And Habakkuk was a fierce God-follower. He believed with all his heart that there is a God. And he believed that God is omnipotently powerful ... there is nothing doable that God can’t do. And he believed that God is omnisciently wise ... there is nothing knowable that God doesn’t know or understand. And he believed that God is totally good. He knew: God loves his people; and God will never, ever, ever do anything wrong.

And yet, Israel was pretty messed up!

- They were supposed to be a theocracy, a nation ruled by God’s laws. But so many of their leaders were terrible; self-absorbed twits. They weren’t leading in a God-honoring way. Sound familiar? And Habakkuk is like, “Come on God ... we need a little intervention here!”
- And the people were using each other, and abusing each other. There was senseless violence. Sound familiar? Been listening to the news? And too often Israel’s “justice system” wasn’t part of the solution, it was part of the problem.
- And the nation’s economy was tanking. And back then if you lost your job your kids didn’t eat. There were no unemployment or stimulus checks. And Habakkuk is like, “Come on God, we need a little help here?”
- And Israel’s enemies were getting stronger and stronger ... especially this one incredibly godless nation called “Babylon.”

So, Habakkuk is like, “Where are you God? Come on! We know you’re powerful, and we know you see what’s going on, and we know you love us, and we know you are perfectly good. So ... Where are you God! We’re praying, we’re asking for help, and it seems like you’re not listening! God, you’re letting the bad guys win and the good guys lose! God ... it looks like you’re doing it wrong!”

And we tackled a couple really big ideas last week. Here’s 1: It’s okay to ask God your hard questions, if they are honest questions. It’s okay to complain to God ... he can handle it. It’s not so smart to complain about God. If you are struggling with God, talk to him about it ... he understands.

Here was another big idea we tackled last week. Sometimes our expectations of God are more like fantasies than legit. We think that because our God is so powerful and so good, well, he ought to make life easier for us. I mean, he ought to protect us from this pandemic, and protect us from the economic mess it's causing so many, and protect us from the bullies out there trying to shame us when we disagree with them? And God says, "You didn't listen! I told you, "In this world you will have trouble." In fact, God says, "I told you that sometimes you'd get extra trouble because you live in a world that is at war with God." God does offer us peace with him right now, and strength in hard times, like right now, and the joy that comes from the hope we have in Christ – we know amazing is coming! But if you think God's job is to make your life easier in this broken world ... well, God's not the one who's messed up!

So, Habakkuk is like, "Where are you, God?! Are you going to do anything about this mess?" And God says, "I've got it. In fact, what I'm going to do is going to blow your mind. You're not going to believe it!" That's something else we talked about last week. Sometimes we don't like God "blowing our minds." Sometimes, it bothers us that we don't understand God. But why? Why would we ever fantasize that we could understand God? God sees things we don't see, he understands things we are clueless about. He sees the big picture ... So it's pretty stupid, isn't it, when we think things like, or say things like ... "I don't see why God is allowing this to happen, so I'm walking away!" Or, "I don't get it God, I don't see how a good God could let something like this happen, I can't follow a God who would let this happen." "My kind of God would do something about this pandemic." "My kind of God would heal my wife, he'd protect my job, he'd do something about that bully, he'd have my back!" "So, if I can't understand what God is doing, then God must be doing it wrong," right? "Or maybe ... maybe, we think ... if I can't figure God out maybe there really is no God at all." Listen guys, he's God! Who he is and what he does will never fit into these tiny little brains. Sometimes we just have to trust him!

And here's what God says to Habakkuk. He says, "This will blow your mind: It's going to get worse – way worse – before it gets better. "I'm going to use the Babylonians – yeah, those despicable Babylonians – I'm going to bring the Babylonians down to Israel, and they are going to crush you, and they are going to carry a whole lot of you into exile. It's going to get worse, before it gets better." And Habakkuk is like, "That's crazy, God! "God, you're the Holy One! You are the Eternal One! You are supposed to be perfectly good, and you are supposed to be infinitely wise ... and your plan is to use them to punish us?! Really?!"

You see, Habakkuk is ruthlessly honest with God, even with his doubts. How smart is that! And he is asking the kinds of questions a lot of people are asking right here, right now.

- How long is this "pandemic" going to go on? You've got the power to stop it God! And now they are talking about a second wave, and a third wave ... maybe.
- And, are they going to come up with a vaccine? They could use a little help, God!
- And, look at how it is tearing this country apart. Guys, I don't remember a time in my life when we've been more polarized – maybe the 60s. I mean it's devolving into violence, God! Don't you think you could intervene a little more forcefully, maybe, God?
- And, a lot of people are scared, God. People are losing their jobs ... Jesus followers are losing their jobs! And a whole lot of people are wondering whether the economic consequences of this quarantine will exceed the medical consequences.
- And, the politicians are out there playing politics ... go figure. Come on!
- And, international tensions are ramping up.
- And, on top of all that, Jesus followers are afraid to go to church. We're trying to do life your way, God, but it's hard. We need the strength, and we need the encouragement, and we need the challenge of the gathered church right now, God.

So, what Habakkuk does next is kind of incredible, to me. He says, “I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guard-post. There I will wait to see what the Lord says and how he will answer my complaint.” (Habakkuk 2.1) He says, “I’m going to climb up to that place where I can focus; and I am going to watch, and I’m going to wait for an answer from you, God.” Which is so smart ... and so stupid. On the one hand, he’s going to wait ... which is smart. On the other hand, he says, “God I want you to explain yourself to me, right now” ... which is stupid. On the one hand, he says he is willing to wait however long is necessary, which is smart. On the other hand, do you know how stupid it is for any man to demand anything from God? Habakkuk kind of reminds me of a 5 year-old kid who threatens his mom, “Give me what I want or I’ll hold my breath!” By the way, the right answer to your 5 year-old is, “Okay, hold your breath! You’ll start breathing again after you pass out.”

But we have an amazingly patient God. And God says to his petulant little prophet, “Get your pencil out. Get ready, “I’m going to tell you what’s coming, and I want you to get it right, so you can tell it to others.” (Habakkuk 2.2) Finally! Do you think Habakkuk is kind of excited? “Here it is! Finally God is going to explain himself. Finally, God is going to tell me his plan.”

And, in a word, God’s word to Habakkuk is ... “wait.” (Habakkuk 2.3) NIV: “Though it linger, wait for it.” NLT: “If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place.” The Message: “If it seems slow in coming, wait. It’s on its way. It will come, right on time.”

And Habakkuk is like, “Seriously, God?! That’s what you are telling me? “Wait”? I’m asking you to do something, and your answer is, “Patience, grasshopper”? ... Listen, did you know that waiting ... faithfully – waiting faithfully – is one of the hardest things God will ever ask you to do? Waiting “faithfully.” You are going to wait on God ... because he’s God. But you will choose whether you will wait “faithfully,” or not. And, guys, did you know that how we wait on God is one of the greatest tests of our faith in God? Especially when times are hard. It’s not so hard to wait faithfully when life is easy, and life is good. It’s when times are hard that waiting faithfully counts. We don’t give up, we don’t despair, we don’t chafe or agitate, we don’t freak out ... I know, a whole lot of us struggle with patience. Well, maybe the toughest kind of patience, maybe the most important kind of patience is ... patience with God ... waiting faithfully.

So, how many of you guys would call yourselves “patient”? I’m not talking about patience with God, I’m talking about just generally patient? ... You guys are weird! Patience is a real struggle for me. It’s right up there with “Be nice, Pattison.” I’m not naturally a nice guy, and I’m not naturally a patient man.

- When I used to play a lot of golf, I hated slow golfers. It’s possible I actually hit into them a few times, accidentally, of course. Just to encourage them to pick up the pace a little.
- When I am driving ... well, my impatience would probably explain a few of the tickets several police officers have gifted me with.
- When I’m shopping, if there is no self-checkout, I look for the shortest line. And then someone ahead of me has issues with their card or something. I hate shopping here in Frankfort, because too many people here recognize me as a preacher, so I have to try to disguise my impatience.
- How about the “waiting room” in a doctor’s office. Do you ever get impatient in a waiting room? I could write the instruction manual.

And then there’s this “pandemic.” Do you think this pandemic has strained our patience, a little? We’re almost militantly polarized, aren’t we? Some are like, “Open things up, now! This quarantine is out of control! And it’s going to do way more damage than this virus! And forget these stupid

facemasks!” And others are like, “Are you so self-centered that you don’t care that people are scared, and dying? Do you hate people so much you wouldn’t put up with a little annoyance to keep them safe? What’s wrong with you?” And neither camp has a scintilla of patience for those on the other side.

Well, guys, our impatience with each other pales into insignificance compared to our impatience with God. Our impatience with people is justified sometimes ... not always, but sometimes. Our impatience with God ... now that is problem that can have eternal consequences. Which is why, over and over and over again, the Bible talks about how to wait faithfully on God, how to be patient with God.

As my preaching partner and I were working on this sermon, we spent a little time pondering why patience is so hard ... at least for some of us. Randy may be worse than I am, and I’m terrible! But Tim Keller pointed out a couple of reasons that kind of hit home for both of us. #1: We think we’re smarter than we really are. That’s one reason we get so impatient. And #2: We think we’re more important than others. We’re arrogant; and we’re self-centered. We think we know; and we think the world revolves around ... me. Which are both bad enough when we’re impatient with people, but they are self-destructively stupid when we’re impatient with God.

Think about it: has your impatience ever caused you to do something really, really stupid?

- You’re honking your horn, and riding their bumper, and then when you pass them and glare at them you see that it’s a 90 year old grandma who’s scared to death. If someone was honking at my grandma and riding her bumper, I’d be ticked! And I’d be impressed, because both my grandmas are dead.
- Or maybe, you’re in that waiting room, and you’re sitting, and you’re waiting, and you’re stewing, and when you finally get to see the doctor, hoping he’ll notice how grumpy you are. And then you find out there’s been this emergency. And you feel like a jerk. That’s happened to me.
- Or you’re in the check-out line, and the cashier is ridiculously slow, and you’re getting ticked. And then you discover it’s her first day, and she’s scared to death, and people are riding her. Poor kid!
- Or you’re at a restaurant, and your waiter or waitress isn’t as attentive, or sweet, as you deserve. And you’re thinking about stiffing her on the tip. And then you discover she’s in the middle of a crisis at home, or she’s just served a table of customers from hell. Been there, done that. Although Julie and I have learned to tip graciously irrespectively, because Julie was on sales floors for 30 years.

You see, you really don’t know with people. You think you know, and sometimes you’re right. But sometimes, we just think we are smarter than we really are. But listen ... listen ... we are never, ever, ever smarter than God! If he doesn’t do it the way we think he should, if he doesn’t do it when we think he should ... guys there’s a reason. And someday you’ll be like ... “Oooh ... Wow ... Wow God!”

And, sometimes we are impatient because we just think we’re more important than others. People need to move out of my way when I’m driving. I may be on a mission from God! I want it now. Do you ever buy something you can’t afford because you are impatient? I want it! I want it now! I want it my way!

By the way, psychologists have tested the importance of the kind of self-control that patience requires. They call it “The Marshmallow Experiment.” They tested hundreds of 4 and 5 year-old kids.

They bring them into a room, sit them down in a chair, and put a marshmallow in front of them. They tell the kids, “I’m going to leave the room. If you don’t eat the marshmallow while I’m gone, I’ll give you another one when I get back, and you’ll have two to eat. But if you eat this one, that’s all you’ll get. One treat now, or two treats later.”

15 minutes later, they come back into the room. And apparently the kids are quite entertaining. Some jump up and eat the marshmallow as soon as the guy leaves the room. Others wiggle, and squirm, and fidget. They fight temptation for a while, and then they break, and they eat it. And, a few kids actually do wait, and they get two. Then the researchers track the kids for quite a few years. Those who are patient, and wait ... end up as a group with higher SAT scores, lower levels of substance abuse, a lower likelihood of obesity, better social skills, better handlers of stress, and pretty much better scores in a host of other measures.

You see, impatience can be cute with kids, but it’s still self-destructive. Impatience is not nearly so cute with adults, and it can mess you up, and others. And impatience with God ... well, that is self-destructively stupid on steroids. It’s not about you. The world does not revolve around you. It does ... revolve around God.

So ... how? How do we wait faithfully on God? There are some clues here in Habakkuk. Listen to what he says. He says, “I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guard-post. There I will wait to see what the Lord says ...” (Habakkuk 2.1) Now, maybe it will help to know a little something about how they built cities back then. Back then they built these walls around their cities. Walls were a big deal when your enemies were attacking. And then, every so often they would build these towers that were quite a bit higher, and that stuck out from the wall. So, if the enemies were attacking your walls, you could shoot at them from the side. And the higher the tower, the more you can see what’s coming. The sooner you can see the trouble, the more time you’ll have to prepare.

And Habakkuk climbs up on his ... watchtower, so to speak ... not literally. He wants to get to a place where he can get as much perspective as he can. And then ... he waits. Now his job is to wait – to watch and to wait. Two pieces I think we need to hang on to ... when it comes to waiting faithfully.

Piece 1: Choose humility. “Choose” humility. Understand, we are waiting on God. And no matter how high we climb, no matter how smart we are, God sees things we can’t see, and he knows things we don’t know. So, I will watch, and I will try to figure him out ... that’s all cool! But if there are things I don’t understand yet, I’m good with that too. He’s God, and I’m not. I trust him. I know he is infinitely powerful ... he’s the Creator! I know he is infinitely smart ... he’s the Creator! And I know he is completely good ... he proved that on a cross. So ... choose humility. If he gives you a glimpse, how cool is that! If you don’t understand him yet, that’s fine too. Choose humility.

Piece 2: Choose obedience. Choose obedience. How many of you guys were in the military? How cool is that! Ever draw guard duty? Here’s the deal: it doesn’t matter whether you feel bad, it doesn’t matter whether you are tired, or bored ... you do your job, right? You can’t decide, “Well, I’ve been here for 3 hours and haven’t seen a thing. I think I’ll knock off early.” You can’t decide, “This guard stuff really isn’t making me happy, I’m outta here.”

Well, Habakkuk is struggling with God. He’s got some big questions that are eating at him. But he’s going to wait faithfully, he will not leave his post. Listen, guys: You may be confused with God, you may be tired of trying to do life his way, you might feel like God is not stepping up when you need

him to, like he's not listening to your prayers ... .. Don't leave your post! "I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guard post. There I will wait to see what the Lord says ..."

You see, we tend to do the opposite. When times are hard, and God seems ... absent. When doing life with God, for God, God's way seems to be making life harder, not easier ... then we tend to stop coming to worship, as often; and stop praying, as much; and stop reading our Bible; and stop connecting with our small group; and stop serving the way we used to. We leave our post! And we're like, "But I wasn't getting anything out of it; this Jesus following wasn't working the way I thought it should!" John Newton – the guy who wrote "Amazing Grace," here's what he said. He said, "I can tell you, you're going to get nothing out of not praying." He says, "If you get nothing from trying every day to go to the throne of grace, I can absolutely assure you, you get nothing by staying away." So, don't quit guys. Waiting faithfully means choosing obedience ... repeatedly.

And there's another piece to this choosing obedience. It's not just about keeping on doing the things you should be doing, it's about quitting the things you shouldn't be doing. You see, sometimes when we get confused with God, or frustrated with God, or just tired ... sometimes when you're empty, and you don't feel like God is there ... you want to feel good, so you start doing things with sex, or you start doing things with money, or you start doing things with food, or whatever ... things that make you feel good in the moment. But you know it's not right, and you know that after the high of the moment, it's going to mess you up. ... Listen, guys: waiting faithfully on God means you don't leave your post. You keep doing what you're supposed to do, and you keep not doing what you know is God dis-honoring. You choose obedience.

I love the way Habakkuk wraps up this little piece. He says, "The righteous will live by faith." (Habakkuk 2.4) The righteous will live by ... trust. And guys, one of the most powerful evidences of trust is this waiting faithfully.

I heard about a new preacher his first Sunday in a little church in eastern Kentucky. He hardly knew any of the people yet, but he took a chance and called on one of the men whose name he remembered to lead in the opening prayer. The man stood as the people bowed and he began, "Lord, I hate buttermilk." The preacher looked up...wondering "What in the world..." Then the guy said, "Lord, I hate lard." The preacher is thinking, "First Sunday, first prayer, epic fail." Then the man added, "Lord, I ain't too crazy about plain flour either. But after you mix 'em all together and bake 'em in a hot oven, I just love biscuits! So Lord, help us realize when life gets hard, when things come up we don't like, whenever we don't understand what you're doing, help us realize that we need to wait and see what your making. After you get through mixing and baking, it'll probably be even better than biscuits. Amen." That's quite a prayer!

The righteous will live by his faith ... Habakkuk says. He will live ... he will live ... by his trust. Maybe you sit there listening, knowing that up until this moment you have never really trusted God. You've always held something back. Maybe you've held everything back. And what have you got for it? Are you happy with the results of trying to do life without God? Or trying to dictate terms to God? Why are you so afraid to try it His way? What's not to trust?

The righteous will live by his faith. Would you like to be righteous—right with God? By the way – the faith part, the trust part is our part; the righteous part is what God does for us, through Jesus. So guys, if you are in the room, let's talk. If you are on line, type "me." Or give us a call, text us, email us ... let's get it done!