

Hab 2:4,5 Sermon Outline

Theme: The righteous will have life by faith

Intro: *Rapport/Application*

Point 1: The Babylonians follow the way of death

Image; you know how this looks/feels

Context: Hab writes ~ 609-598BC ie ~ reign of Jehoiakim; a contemporary to Nahum, Zeph, Jer.

Judah had witnessed the downfall & exile of Israel slightly more than a century before. She hadn't learnt however that repeated violation of her covenant with God wouldn't be left unpunished forever. So Babylonians would be used by God to judge rebellious Judah

2:2-20: In light of Hab's q's re the fitness of using a violet pagan instrument to punish Gods' people Yahweh tells of the pending destruction of Babylon in 539 BC to Medes/Persians under Cyrus.

Their attributes:

self-righteous: (his desires (soul/life) are not upright—) cf Dt 12:8; Ps 32:11; Is 26:7

upright; a moral quality of heart cf Dt 9:5 etc, & a manner of life characteristic of the blameless cf Pr 11:3. not upright leads to pride & failure

III

arrogance/pride ie. self-dependence, no need for/reliance on God: (⁴“See, he is puffed up) cf 1:7, 10,11 cf Pr 21:24

III;

drunken (⁵ indeed, *wine betrays (acts/deals faithlessly/treacherously) him;*)

greedy (as *greedy* as the grave)

never content (*never at rest*. and like death is *never satisfied*,)

he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.

Their end: death cf Pr 14:12; 16:25, their implied though unstated end. cf following woes cf 1:15-17; 2:6-17

Believe in? Repent from? Prick conscience / prompt will / prime passions/drives

Extend; so what are you going to do about it this week?

Point 2: Believers follow the way of life

Image; you know how this looks/feels

Context: thinking about those more righteous than the Babylonians but about to be judged by them

Their attributes

righteous, *in contrast* to not upright: the nature & will of God. The righteous one tries to keep the peace & prosperity of the community by fulfilling the commands of God in regard to others cf Job 29:12,13; Dt 24:13. Mercy for the helpless, gives freely cf ps 37:21

III;

faith/faithfulness/trust *in contrast* to pride

in fact, declared righteous by faith cf 1:4,13;

Their end: will live (ie 'have life', not 'behave') *in contrast* to death

III;

Israel, both temporally in contrast to the Babylonians who would soon disappear from the world stage, & eschatologically. life is decided by a right relationship to the righteous standards fo the Word of God – in contrast to the ANE where men souhgt to link themselves with forces of lfie thought of in terms of nature de3ities, by magical recitations of myth accompanied by appropriate magical ritual. cf Dt 30:15-20; choose life Dt 32:47; Ezk 3:18ff; 14:13ff etc. cf Dt 8:3; Ps 119:50,93 & Jesus use.

by his faith— *in contrast* to deeds cf Dt 32:4 and attribute of God, and also refers to those whose lives God establishes cf Pr 12:22; 2 Chr 19:9

cf Ro 1:17; imputed by God on the basis of faith – the gospel – that because one believes God, persuaded that is covenant promises are reliable (cf Ge 15:6; Am 5:21-24) one is considered righteous and granted life. *Salvation History* ??? *Where is Jesus in this text?*

Gal 3:11; contrasted to self-righteousness, attempted through pious acts 'the law'.

became the goad which prompted Luther to reexamine his own theology with momentous consequences for the Reformation.

Kingdom vision/Be inspired

Believe in? Repent from? Prick conscience / prompt will / prime passions/drives

Extend; so what are you going to do about it this week?

Aim: Believe, and be declared righteous / receive life

Hab 2:4,5 rev

Dear Congregation

There's a saying that goes, 'Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; show him how to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.'

And it's true. But God takes that to another level again. He says, 'man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.'

God's point is that life isn't simply about eating and existing. It's about the quality of that existence. Is it an existence spent in relationship with God – do we have life to the full, or are we the living dead – are we dead even as we live? And so, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says too, 'Don't worry about what you'll eat or drink or wear, but seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness'

Point 1

Thinking about this book of Habakkuk, it might not be a book you know all that well. But it's not the longest book in the Bible – only 3 chapters. You can read the whole book in a few minutes. And as you do you see that Habakkuk is wrestling with God. It comes out in a conversation made up of 2 complaints that God answers, and then a final prayer.

Habakkuk's first complaint is why evil in Judah goes unpunished. God's answer is that it's only a matter of time before he will punish it using the Babylonians. Then Habakkuk's 2nd complaint is how can a just God possibly use the wicked Babylonians to punish Judah, who are at least still more righteous than them. And God's 2nd answer is that the Babylonians will also be punished for their wickedness, but He will look after the righteous.

These verses we're looking at this morning come out of that 2nd answer.

And so, if you know a little bit about history, Habakkuk is writing about 600 years Before Christ. The Northern tribe of Israel had gone into exile about 100 years before because of their sin. But Judah hasn't learnt the lesson from Israel's exile - they seem to think that they can follow their example and not face the

same consequences.

And so in his first complaint Habakkuk is most concerned about the wickedness in Judah – doesn't God notice it? But then when he hears God's plans for Judah, he's more worried about God's solution – and God has to assure him that all will work out in the end.

But in the verses that we're looking at this morning, *the Babylonians present one approach that you can take to existence* between the cradle and the grave. The only question is whether you can call that kind of existence 'life', or whether we should really call it 'death'.

They're described as *puffed up*. It means proud, arrogant. In chapter 1:7 it says that they're a law to themselves, promoting their own honour. Verses 10 & 11 say, 'They [ridicule] kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them. Then they sweep past like the wind and go on – guilty men, whose own strength is their god.'

These people don't see any need for the true God of the Bible, especially when he doesn't even seem to be able to protect his own people. They rely on themselves and their own strength. They worship whatever they believe has given them the latest military victory.

And as well as being proud, they're *unrighteous* – not upright. Upright people live God's way – people like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Job. But that doesn't describe the Babylonians. Maybe God is using them in some way for his grand plan and purpose, but they're wicked, evil, a ruthless and impetuous people who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own – feared and dreaded. And that's what gets Habakkuk so concerned – how could God possibly consider using them to judge his own people.

And then also in verse 5, you see them for what they really are. They enjoy the spoils of war a bit too much, like *wine*. Maybe they're strong and ruthless in battle, maybe they can even show amazing discipline when they need to, but what are they like after they win? At heart they're drunks who have let victory go to their heads.

And they're *greedy*, greedy as the grave, always wanting more, never content with what they have. And so, after defeating the Assyrians in 612BC they quickly advanced up through Mesopotamia and then south toward Israel over the next 7 years, always greedy for more territory, even defeating Egypt and her allies, and eventually taking Jerusalem a few years later again in 586BC.

But if you live by the sword you die by the sword. And if you're as greedy as death, death is your reward. The result of living this way is death. Proverbs 14 says that there's a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. And you only have to read the 5 'woes' against the Babylonians that come after this passage to see that. They will become the victim. They exhaust themselves for nothing. They will be filled with shame and disgrace. The violence they have done will overwhelm them. And they will eventually stand silent before the Lord.

And history proves how right that is. In 539BC, 60 years after Habakkuk wrote this, the Medes and Persians united against the Babylonians, and destroyed them. Israel lived on to return from exile, but the Babylonian Empire had come to an end. They looked like they were doing well for a while, but they took the way of death and destruction, and eventually reaped it for themselves. The speed the Babylonians wiped out their enemies is still famous today, but just as quickly they were wiped out themselves.

Point 2

And so, the alternative to this hell-bent path of death and destruction for the wicked *is life for the righteous*.

And Habakkuk was concerned about this alternative. If you go back to his first complaint in chapter 1, you see that he was wanting to see the righteous saved from the wicked. Maybe Judah as a nation was rebelling against God and going their own way, but there were still folk in Judah who were faithful to God. Habakkuk wanted to see them saved from the rest of Judah who were persecuting them and taking advantage of them.

And so, first of all, Habakkuk must have been shocked at a message of judgement against all of Judah, rather than a message of salvation for the righteous.

And now secondly, he's shocked with how God is going to judge, and who he's going to use - as far as he could see, even the unrighteous in Judah were more righteous than the Babylonians – how could God use the Babylonians to judge Judah?

But God hadn't forgotten the righteous. In fact, as it says here, 'the righteous will live by their faith'.

And just thinking about *attributes* again. They're not listed here for the righteous in the same way they are for the Babylonians. But you can go back through the attributes of the wicked, think of their opposites, and you start to see what the righteous are like. They're not proud and arrogant but humble, not wicked but upright, not betrayed by wine and their greed, but self-controlled, and content with their lot in life.

Most of all, the righteous have faith in God and faithfulness to God.

The wicked rely on themselves. They think they can get by, by themselves. They don't need anyone greater than themselves to lean on for help. They don't need a crutch. They definitely don't need some idea of the God of the Bible to help them face life. They can do it on their own – they're self-made men and women.

But the righteous put their faith in God and trust in him for everything they need.

You only have to think of the giants of faith in the Old Testament to see that. Think of King David, the greatest king Old Testament Israel ever had. Read his psalms and see where he looked for his help and strength. In Psalm 3 he writes, '... LORD, how many are my foes! ... But you are a shield around me' Psalm 5 says, 'Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,' Psalm 6, 'O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony.' Psalm 7, 'O LORD my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me,' And of course, there's Psalm 121, 'My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.'

And then, if you go to psalms like Psalm 51, you see that he understood that he wasn't righteous in himself. He wasn't righteous because he lived such a good life, but because God declared him righteous and cleaned

away his sin. God declared him righteous because he looked to him in faith for help - he repented from his sin and asked God to blot out his transgressions, wash away his iniquity, and cleanse him from his sin.

And, on that basis the righteous don't reap death as their reward, but life. The righteous will live by their faith.

And to tell you the truth, a light turned on for me as I was thinking about this a couple of years ago. When I'd read this in the past, I'd taken 'live' to mean 'live out your life' – the righteous will live out their life according to their faith – their faith will be the compass that guides how they live their life from day to day. But that's not what it's saying. 'Live' here means 'have life' as opposed to 'die' – the righteous will have life by their faith. The Babylonians will die. The wicked have death - they're dead in their transgressions and sins. Even as they live and breathe, their existence is an existence of death, which is then also their final destination. But the righteous will have God-given life by their faith.

In Habakkuk's day that meant that even though the Babylonians were destined to disappear off the world stage 539 years Before Christ, Judah - who at least contained some who were righteous - would live on. And even though the wicked in Judah were dead in their sin and faced eternal death, the righteous in Judah had life by faith in God, and could look forward to eternal life.

Life isn't just about heart pumping and lungs breathing and brain functioning. It's not about a blip on a monitor in the hospital. It's not about working hard and playing hard. Life is about relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ - being faithful to God, and having our work and our family life and our play flow out of our relationship with God. And so in Deuteronomy 30 already, God said to Israel, 'See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.' And through his prophets, like Amos, God also said over and over again, 'Seek me and live.'

And if you know your Bibles at all, you'll know that this theme of the righteous having life by their faith in

spite of their sin is in fact the Bible's basic message. You can go back to Genesis 15 and read about Abraham being given a righteousness not his own because he believed God. Or you can go forward to Romans 1:17 where it says that 'in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live (have life) by faith." This is the basic gospel message that God begins to reveal in Genesis 3:15. It's there in shadow in the Old Testament. And it bursts into blazing light in Jesus. If we trust in God through Jesus Christ, he gives us a righteousness that we don't have ourselves – that we can't get any other way. Our sins are forgiven. We have eternal life. Paul directly quotes Habakkuk again in Gal 3:11 when he writes, 'Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because "The righteous will live (have life) by faith."

Conc

We call this principle that underpins the Bible's basic message 'justification by faith'. God sees us as if we'd never sinned because we have put our faith in Jesus who has taken our sin on himself.

In fact, we're looking at this passage especially today because in 2 days time it will be October 31st, the anniversary of the Reformation. This is the message that was rediscovered during the Reformation. It's the good news that fired up Martin Luther to reexamine his understanding of the Bible's message with amazing consequences for the world ever since. On Oct 31st 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 statements against the practices of the Church of his day on the door of the Church in Wittenberg, Germany, and sparked the Reformation.

One historian writes, 'Although light began to dawn by slow degrees as the prelude to dawn, Luther later looked back to a particular occasion when, like the sudden appearance of the sun, it broke upon him. He had been lecturing on the Psalms in the summer of 1513. In the autumn of 1515 he lectured on Paul's Letter to the Romans. In 1516-1517 his subject was the Letter to the Galatians. Somewhere along the way, at what precise hour we cannot tell, the phrase in the Letter to the Romans (1:17), "the just shall live by faith," became, through him, a distinctive principle of Protestantism.'

And it still needs to be a basic principle that we understand today if we hope to understand the gospel's message.

Our situation might be different to Judah's at that time in history, but the principle's still the same – it's the righteous who have life by their faith. The question is, are you one of the righteous? Has God *declared* you righteous because of your faith in his Son, Jesus? Do you have this life that will last forever, even beyond the grave?