

The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.

²How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? ³Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.

^{2:1}I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint

²Then the LORD replied: “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. ³For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

⁴“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright— but the righteous will live by his faith.” (NIV84)

Theme: Wait for the Lord.

1. He answers our prayers in due time
2. He will save the righteous through faith.

You turn on the T.V., open up the newspaper, or click on your favorite websites and what do you see? This world is seemingly falling apart. Murders and other acts of violence are rampant. It seems that every week there is a bombing or a shooting going on someplace. Marriage in the eyes of many is no longer between a man and a woman till death. Children without parents. Almost one million babies are murdered each year in our country under the guise of “women’s health.” TV shows and movies are becoming increasingly wicked and immoral. You can drive down the streets of many cities in Michigan and see nothing but abandoned buildings and desolate areas—results of years of neglect and a faltering economy. The world is getting increasingly self-centered. Many don’t care about God or his Word as much as they care about making more money in order to buy more things and have more fun. Sports and other forms of entertainment are increasingly becoming more important and are keeping people away from the Lord. Race relations are getting worse and a number of communities are violently protesting against the very police officers

who serve and protect them. Some who commit crimes get away with hardly a slap on the wrist while others are falsely imprisoned—there is often very little justice. Those who are in positions of authority often abuse that authority; they look out for themselves and their own interests instead of looking after their own people. Many leaders take advantage of the poor and needy for political. There is strife and conflict between leaders and their people and between the people. Laws are being passed that subvert God’s will and hinder Christians from obeying the Lord. It seems as if Christians, especially, are attacked and vilified instead of protected and defended. There is much strife, wickedness, and violence in our country today.

I’m sure you have thought of other examples in your head about how this world, and our country in general seem to be falling apart. I know I can list a lot more, and I don’t consider myself some old man who thinks that the “good ol’ days” were so much better and less wicked!

The prophet Habakkuk also thought that his world was falling apart all around him. At the time of his ministry Israel, the northern kingdom, had already fallen to the Assyrians. Their cities were destroyed and all the people would be taken away to foreign lands, seemingly lost to history forever. Only two tribes remained—Judah and Benjamin who occupied the land around Jerusalem. It seems as if the Babylonians had already defeated the Assyrians and soon they would defeat the Egyptians before setting their sights on Jerusalem with Nebuchadnezzar as their king.

Jehoiakin was the king of Judah at the time. He was wicked and did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. He heavily taxed the people and then stole some of that money for his personal gain, he enslaved his own countrymen and forced them to build buildings in his name, he sacrificed to false gods—even throwing his own children in fires to Baal and encouraged his people to do the same, he killed Urijah, a prophet, who spoke against him and persecuted Jeremiah and burned his scroll of prophecies.

The prophet Habakkuk lived in Jerusalem at this time—he saw all these atrocities of the king and the wickedness of his people. Habakkuk’s book is a unique one in that he didn’t speak a message directly to the people on behalf of the Lord. Instead he records a

dialogue between him and God. We get a good feel for this dialogue in our text for today.

What does Habakkuk do? He complained to God. He saw all the violence in the country. He complains about sorrows and troubles that he is forced to see, the devastation and violence all around him and the strife and contention among the people. Later he will complain about injustice and oppression of the leaders. There were all sorts of wickedness going on and Habakkuk wanted to know why God didn't seem to care, as if he turned a blind eye to everything that was going on or didn't want to help his people.

What are your thoughts about the way things are going in our country? Perhaps your thoughts are the same as Habakkuk's—why all this wickedness in the world? There is so much violence and corruption, a lack of justice and a lack of care and concern for God and his Word. People are self-centered and ever more worldly. Why do believers seem to suffer while the wicked prosper?

Why does God not seem to care? Why does it seem as if he turns a blind-eye to all this sin? Why doesn't he do something about it? Why doesn't he make the wicked pay for their sins? Why doesn't help those who believe in him and obey his will?

The Lord did answer Habakkuk's plea; it just wasn't the answer the Habakkuk expected or wanted. God said that he was going to punish the wicked people in Judah by sending the Babylonians who would eventually kill them, destroy the country, and take the rest to exile. Habakkuk wasn't exactly pleased. He responded by asking why would you send a people even more wicked than us to destroy your people because of their wickedness? Habakkuk wanted the Lord to take a different action, to do something else to destroy the wickedness in Judah.

Then we get to chapter two. Habakkuk makes his case and then he waits. He stands watch waiting for the Lord's replay—to see what he might say and do in response to his complaint. And the Lord's answer came in a vision.

Our world is similar to Habakkuk's and we also cry out to the Lord for help and for answers in this sin-filled world. But we don't have to wait for the Lord's answers. For he has already answered our questions and complaints. He already speaks to us in his holy Word. In his Word he instructs us about how to live in a sin-filled world. He urges us to put him first in our lives, to have nothing to do with

wickedness and rebellion. He tells us to live at peace with one another. And although we may disagree with those placed in authority over us, we are still to respect them and pray for them—even when they mistreat us and persecute us. And he urges us to stand firm in the one true faith. He knows the temptations we face, he knows how easy it would be to deny him or some of his teachings in order to avoid persecution so he urges us to stay strong in our faith, to defend the truth, and share his Word with others.

But his Word does far more than give us instructions on how to live our lives in a sin-filled world. More importantly, it gives us comfort and encouragement through the gospel. As the Lord heard Habakkuk's prayer, he also hears ours. He has not left us alone to fight for ourselves; he does not turn a blind-eye to the evil and wickedness going on all around us. But he sees everything, he knows our fight, and he is with us every step of the way—watching over us and protecting us from all harm and danger.

But there is much more—notice the last words of the Lord in our text for today: **The righteous will live by faith.** At the end of the world, at the end of your life—you will live. You will be taken to heaven to live forever with the Lord. And that eternal life will be free from sin, from sorrow, from injustice, from persecution, from strife, contention, and violence. It will be a perfect life that goes on into eternity. And this life is yours because of Christ. He is the one who suffered and died on the cross to forgive all your sins. He was forsaken by the Father as he took your sins upon himself to pay the eternal punishment that you deserved. He rose from the dead to win for us a new life after our death. He has saved you and made you righteous, or holy, before God. Jesus took his perfect life and gave it to us while he was on the cross. So when God looks at you he considers you perfect and holy—righteous in his sight on account of his son. He has saved the whole world and those that believe in him as the world's one and only Savior receive all that he has won for us. And this faith that receives is a gracious gift of God as well! He has done everything needed to be saved for us.

And that's where our comfort and encouragement lies as wickedness is all around us. We will live in heaven because of Christ. Yes, we pray for this world to obey the Lord, to be less wicked and violent, and so on; but the truth is, we will never rid the world of wickedness; it has

always been sinful and there is nothing new under the sun. But God's ultimate answer to the world's wickedness really has nothing to do with this life here on earth—but the life in heaven where Christ will take you forever. So we look heavenward and we long for the fulfillment of this promise to take place.

We know that on the last day Christ will come and judge the world. It will be completely destroyed and those who don't believe in him will perish forever. God may or may not punish the wicked world before then—he often chooses to do so behind the scenes. But we do know that God is in control over his entire creation and will do what pleases him. So we wait for God to act. When the time is right he will exercise his authority over even unbelievers. When the time is right he will come with judgment to punish the world. But he comes not just with judgment but with salvation, which he gives to all who believe. And so what do we do as we wait for this salvation to come—what is our job as we wait for the Last Day? We prepare our hearts and minds by being in God's Word—so that we are comforted and encouraged by the words of our Lord. But we also share God's Word. If you want to make this world a better place, if you want to slow down the wickedness, violence, corruption, and so on—share the Word. You cannot expect an unbeliever to live as a Christian—they don't care about God or his will. We share the Word so that the Holy Spirit may bring them to faith and through forgiveness motivate them to live a new life according to the grace God has given them.

At times it may also be our job to defend the truth against attacks, to stand up for God's Word. Maybe we must point out the wickedness of others, the injustice and violence that we see. We do this because we know that God's judgment is coming and we don't want anyone to perish, but all to receive salvation.

Like Habakkuk we live in a sin-filled and wicked world that seems to be on the brink of destroying itself. We may wish that God would punish all wicked doers and sinners to make this world good again. But God will punish when he wants to punish and he will bring his judgment when the time is right. And so as we wait for the Lord we remain in the one truth faith and we share his Word with others. For Christ's answer to the wickedness of this world is simply, **the righteous will live by faith.** Heaven is the answer, not a better life on

earth. Salvation by Christ received through faith. What better answer can the Lord give his children? Amen.