

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity, October 15, 2023

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 2, 272:4, 371, 370, 77:14-15.

Lessons: Habakkuk 1:1-2:4, Romans 8:28-32, Matthew 5:6-10.

Sermon Text: Habakkuk 1:1-3 and 2:1-4.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This book of the Bible begins with Habakkuk complaining that the Lord doesn't hear him. His descriptions of violence, iniquity, perverted justice, strife, contention and destruction could as easily be read in our daily newspaper and heard on our nightly news.

He thinks God doesn't hear his prayers, and the first chapter of this short three-chapter book is filled with complaints as you heard in our Old Testament lesson. That chapter has headings found in the Hebrew original of "Habakkuk's Complaint" and "Habakkuk's Second Complaint."

Don't we sometimes think that God isn't listening to our prayers, that he doesn't hear us? Please listen carefully as we see

HABAKKUK'S COMPLAINTS AND GOD'S ANSWERS

- 1. We hear about the wickedness the prophet sees and**
- 2. The hope God shows the prophet.**

Habakkuk had these experiences in the nation of Judah, about 600 years before the Savior was born in Bethlehem. Things are terrible in the day of Habakkuk. The people God had selected out of all people on earth to be the first to receive the Savior were terribly wicked.

The book begins with the words "*The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.*" In the Bible, an oracle is a divinely inspired message spoken or written by a prophet sent by God. Pagans also believed, especially in Ancient Rome and Greece, that some things which their false prophets said or wrote came from their pagan gods and those messages, were "oracles", and the people who delivered them, were also called "oracles".

Habakkuk is convinced that the Lord is not listening, although he is repeatedly calling for help: "*How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?*" Don't we sometimes feel that way? We pray day after day, sometimes repeating the same specific words for our specific concerns, and we may think that the Lord God is not listening to us and is not answering our prayers.

We can look around us and see violence, sometimes even in our own neighborhoods. We see injustice because the people of the world "*tolerate wrong.*" And the prophet asks directly of God: Why do you tolerate this? Why do you put up with it? We can only imagine the way Noah felt in his lifetime when "*The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.*" (Genesis 6:5, NIV84) We can imagine the way Abraham felt as he saw Sodom and Gomorrah and even his own nephew, Lot living in the midst of such wickedness.

There is wickedness and evil and sinfulness all around us, and we who believe in the one true God are being attacked from every side by those who think and even tell us that Christians are wrong to speak against sin.

The prophet is asking God and, in a sense, seems to be blaming God: "*Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.*"

But God is not to blame. Mankind is responsible for such sinning. We ourselves are not immune, or exempt. We, too, are guilty of the kinds of things the prophet is lamenting. Sinful mankind is to blame, and even the face I see in the mirror is guilty of wrong, of causing strife and conflict. No one is sinless.

We don't have to spend much time in this sermon describing the evil and violence and strife and conflict and wickedness we see. God's law makes clear exactly what is sin. But we must recognize it, and realize that we are not innocent of blame.

The rest of the first chapter details what the prophet sees, and what we see if we only open our eyes to what is happening in our world.

But God through the prophet sets more before our eyes. He is willing to stand watch and be prepared for battle against sin. He writes in the second part of our text: ***"I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what [God] will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint."***

The prophet is not alone in seeing the wickedness running rampant in the world. He is looking to God for an answer to the complaints of all believers who may think that God is not guiding all things.

God makes his answer plain. He even tells the prophet to ***"Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it."*** Once God's revelation is written down, other messengers, heralds, can share it – not just walking to tell others, but running to tell others the good news.

And, of course, you are one of God's heralds. You have been given the command to ***"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."*** (Mark 16:15, NIV84)

Habakkuk and the people of his day had to wait for the time God appointed to send the Savior. He didn't know when the appointed time would come. That was in God's eternal hands. An end to looking for and waiting for the Redeemer from sin and wickedness would come in God's right time.

Just as the faithful Habakkuk really couldn't wait for the Savior to come, so we as faithful followers of Christ can't wait for our Savior to come to earth the second time, on Judgment Day.

Habakkuk was looking forward to the coming of the Savior. The prophet waited patiently for a message from God.

We could look at these words and look forward to the end of time. The message of a day of judgement, which will be a day of deliverance and release for the believer will come. And it could come any moment!

We can look at the words "wait for it", "wait for it", "wait for it", and be assured that the day of release from this wicked world will come – in God's right time. We read ***"For 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."***

Just as we daily pray for deliverance from all that troubles us, we must realize that God hears our prayers and has promised to hear us. But sometimes his immediate answer is "not now", or "not in the exact way you think that God should answer your prayers." But God does hear us and will answer our prayers.

And what is the revelation, the glorious message? It is a message that has been repeated many times in the written Scripture. ***"The righteous will live by his faith."***

And who is the righteous one? How is anyone made righteous? Remember, righteous means good, virtuous, sinless, morally perfect. The child of God stands in the robe of righteousness which Christ provides. We are washed clean in the blood of the lamb!

We are made righteous by God's decree of "not guilty of all your sins". Believe that and be saved! God declares "you are not guilty because my Son kept all my law perfectly in your place. And more: You are not guilty; you are righteous because my sinless Son was punished for your sins. Believe that and be saved!" ***"The righteous will live by his faith."***

It is his faith, not anyone else's. Any faith your parents, your grandparents or anyone else had will not save you.

The righteous one is not boasting of his own goodness. He is not puffed up. He still has his sin clinging to him, ***"his desires are not upright."***

But the believer, the true Christian looks to Christ to wash him clean from his sins. And the Christian believes God, just as Scripture says ***"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*** (Romans 4:1–3, NIV84)

This is not man's way of looking at things. It is the foolishness of preaching the gospel of Christ that saves. We read in First Corinthians: ***“God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’”*** (1 Corinthians 1:27–31, NIV84) Scripture tells us again in Second Corinthians: ***“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”*** (2 Corinthians 10:17, NIV84) And especially as we approach the Festival of the Reformation, we remember ***“it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** (Ephesians 2:8–9, NIV84)

You hear the Word of God. You hear the absolution in our worship services: “Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us and has given his only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins.” You read in Scripture what the Savior Jesus Christ did for you. And remember that his cleansing makes you righteous.

“The righteous will live by his faith.”

The last words of Habakkuk's short book of prophecy assure us that no matter how difficult things are for the follower of Christ, God is our strength and we will be joyful in Jesus Christ. He uses the picture of famine and crop failure when he tells us ***“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.”*** (Habakkuk 3:17–19, NIV84)

This is our hope. The Savior has come to earth and has accomplished his work. The Savior has come to you through the preaching of the truth of God's Word and from your personal reading and study of God's Word. May he continue to come into your ears and hearts each day until you are received into heaven to enjoy eternity with your Savior. Amen.