

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. We have Habakkuk, not one we hear very often, but a prophet, one of the minor prophets towards the end of the age just before they get put into exile roughly around the same time as Amos. And what does Habakkuk say? His message sounds vaguely familiar, but it starts out with something of a complaint, a complaint against God." Oh Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear? Or cry to you violence and you will not say, 'Why do you make me see iniquity and why do you idly look unwrong?' Destruction and violence are before me. Strife and contention arise." The law is paralyzed and justice never goes forth. The wicked surround the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted. If I didn't tell you this was from Habakkuk, you could almost imagine it was written yesterday. It feels like there is chaos, there is destruction. Justice is not being served, the wicked or surrounding the righteous; it feels like that today, doesn't it?

And maybe some of us have the same question. God, where are you? Why are you not doing anything? And that's a similar cry that has come out in several of the different prophets. Elijah's like, "God, where are you? I'm the only one left." It's like, oh, poor me. Everything is going wrong, and God doesn't listen to me. David has several Psalms about that same thing. Why does the wicked succeed and the good die? Why is it unfair in this world? And why aren't you doing something about it?

The thing of it is is we often want God to act in the way that we think He should act. We want Him to just make everything right, just to twist the hearts and minds of people and force them to do the right thing. Wouldn't world be better if He would just do that? But we know that's not how He works. He has given us the ability to reject Him, and we have taken it and run with it. But He has not left us without His word and His presence. And God is still indeed acting, acting in a way that does provide peace and comfort and hope not by the power of the physical sword, but the power of His holy sword, the sword of the Holy Spirit, which is the word of God, which goes forth and changes people's hearts and minds.

It doesn't make bad government good government, it doesn't make unjust laws just laws, but what it does do is it works in the hearts and minds of all of humanity, all who hear the word of the Lord, all who hear God's word. And it changes us by the power of the Holy Spirit because Christ Jesus has abolished death and brought life and immortality light through the gospel. It is the gospel that is the power of salvation. It is the gospel that is the power to give us hope. Because let's face it, there is never going to be a time in this world where there isn't corruption and greed. We are currently in the time of tribulation; have been since Christ rose from the dead. Who knows how long it's going to go on, but we are in a time of tribulation, the time of tribulation. And what is the sign of the time and the world

that Christ is coming soon? There's going to be wars and rumors of war. Name a time in history where that hasn't been true. In other words, we are never going to get rid of the violence and corruption in this world because we are filled with sin. Humanity is corrupted by sin, and it's always going to be with us. We need to understand that.

We need to understand that our job is not to fight to create a just society, at least not mainly. Our job is to proclaim the word of God in its truth. If that condemns some people, as Jesus said, "Rebuke your brother. If they sin, rebuke him. And if they repent, forgive them." Now, wait a second; I thought earlier on we said, "Do not judge lest you be judged," and yet here it's saying rebuke your brother. How do those two work together? Well, to judge someone is to be on the superior side of things. I judge you because you're not as good as me. That's what it's talking about. By judging, we're like, you should be as good as I am, and then everything would be great if you were just like me. That's judging. Rebuking them is saying, "This is what God's word says, and you are going against the word of God." And they're being humble enough to say, "I have also gone against the word of God and need His redemption as much as you."

We are called to be salt and light, to bring the light of Christ into the world. And we're not going to do that by force, we're going to do that by humility, we're going to do that by gentleness. What does it say? That God has given us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control. But that power is not the power to force somebody to do right, and it's not the power that we have, it's the power of God unto salvation. We have the power to walk in this world without fear.

How often do we look at the world around us, turn on the TV and listen to the news, see what's going on in the courts and see what's going on in the streets and see what's going on in the world and we are afraid? And we think what is going on? Why is this happening? And what can I do about it?

What can you do about it? Same thing you are always called to do: Pray. Start out by praying for yourself and praying for your leaders and praying for all people that God's word might work in and through them, that we might serve God as we are called to serve, knowing that Christ is never going to force anybody, but only that He offers His gifts, and freely to everyone who calls upon His name.

But we have the power to not be afraid of the chaos of this world. We have the power to not be afraid even when we suffer. And we, as Christians, are called to take up our cross and follow Him. We may have to deal with a thorn in our flesh, we may go to prison, as Paul was, but we are not ashamed, nor are we afraid because it is in our trust of God's love for us that hearts and minds are changed.

The Roman government did not become Christian overnight and did not become Christian because the Christians forced them to become Christian, the Christians were thrown to the lions. They were crucified. They were drawn and quartered. And what did they do in the midst of that suffering? They praised God. They sang hymns and psalms and spiritual songs. They worshiped the Lord with gladness and joy because they knew that to live is Christ and to die is gain. And they knew that in this world, we will have tribulation. That's not going to change.

But take heart; Christ has overcome the world. And if Christ has overcome the world, then we can forgive one another. We can walk in light and immortality. We can serve God with all of our heart, all of our mind, and all of our soul because we know what He has done for us. And we can look upon His promises and trust that no matter what evil is in this world, we can declare the truth of His word. And it is that truth that will shine a light into the wilderness. It is that truth that will change some people's minds. Not going to change everybody's, and we need to know that. No matter how hard you try, no matter how good your reason is, no matter how faithful your argument is, it's not always going to convince everybody because it's not you that is doing it, it's the word of God and the power of Holy Spirit; and some are receptive and some are not. Don't worry about it, just proclaim God's word, walk faithfully in His word, and trust God for everything else.

Habakkuk seemed frustrated. And when you're frustrated, it's very tempting to pay back as you've received, to counter power with power; an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. You backstab me, I'm going to backstab you. You gossip about me, I'm going to gossip about you. You cheat me, I'm going to cheat you. That's how the world works, and that's our natural desire. But what God says is have self-control and love because God has forgiven us, and we are called to forgive one another. And when the word of God is working in our lives, then we can joyfully do our duty before God. Live a life that is pleasing to God no matter what the rest of the world says, no matter what the rest of the world thinks. No matter whether it seems like nothing good is happening in this world, we can still walk in faith, we can still serve God because we know His promises are true and we know He will never leave us nor forsake us.

There are wars and rumors of wars. There is tribulation and trial in this world. Sometimes it seems like nothing is being done and God has abandoned us, but He has not. He came into this world so that He might give us Himself and His love and His forgiveness so that we might not be afraid because we have a spirit and power of love, of self-control. And we have good deposit, the deposit of Christ's death and resurrection given to us. And we are not afraid. God has not abandoned us, He is with us always to the very end of the age. Hold fast to His word. Hold fast to His promises, study His word, learn it, chew on it, digest it, focus upon it.

And in that way, in that way, you'll bear witness to His love to those around you, and you will be at peace. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forever more, unto life everlasting. Amen.