

Intro to Sermon series- from Perplexity to Peace (put on youtube [here](#)).

- I wonder if you've ever asked a question like this...
 - **God** what on earth are you doing?
 - Why don't you listen to my prayers?
 - Why do you let such bad things happen?

We're currently living through a global pandemic, the effects of which we will be felt for decades to come. Hundreds of thousands of people have died, and there has been financial and emotional turmoil. Lord what are you doing? How long must we face this?

Well do you know that these are very similar questions to the ones **Habakkuk** asked around 2600 years ago. Let me introduce you to him briefly.

- Habakkuk the bloke:
 - What about him as a person? Well we don't know very much- He doesn't appear anywhere else in the Bible. He is a prophet. This means that the message which he spoke in his day, and which he speaks to us in our day, was and is from God. It's essential that we remember this, so that as we read the book we bow humbly before our God who speaks to us.
 - We don't know much about when he lived either, but the most likely answer is around 600 years before Jesus, because he speaks of the coming of the Babylonians (1:6 Chaldeans) who invaded his home town of Jerusalem in 587BC.
- Next Habakkuk the book -
 - Habakkuk is the 8th of what are called the minor prophets: men who spoke to the people of God towards the end of the OT period, (and whose messages weren't as long as the maj prophets: Is, Jer, Ezk, Dan.) And because it's not massively long, why not read it before we start. It will take you around 10 minutes.
 - It's an important book because it contains a verse quoted in the New Testament that takes us to the heart of the Christian faith. "The righteous person will live by faith". So it will be a great help to Christians and those wanting to know more about Christianity.
- Well so much for the book, the bloke, how about Habakkuk the message?
- (or if you want another B, Habbakuk's **burden**- for that is the literal translation of the "oracle", or burden which God gave him to share with the people v1. We sometimes talk about someone being burdened with something they want to share with someone else, and it's like a weight off their back when they release it.
- Well even if he lived a long time ago, his message has an enduring quality, because he addresses some timeless questions which every generation struggles with. Namely why doesn't God stop bad things happening. While we won't find all the answers to that (just like we didn't when we looked at 3 sermons on suffering a couple of years ago), we will nevertheless see that Habakkuk found a perspective that took him from perplexity and heartache to confidence and peace. So much so that he finishes the book saying **this**. *"The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights."*

So do join us as me, Matt Gurtler and Tim Chapman lead us through his short book over 3 weeks, and as we travel with Habakkuk let's make this journey from fear to faith from perplexity to peace.

Sermon 1- “Lord what are you doing?”

- v5 Aussie Preacher John Chapman
 - recurring nightmare asked to read Habakkuk in Sydney Cathedral
 - Couldn't find it
 - Index missing
 - Had to do the “slow trawl” in front of all the dignitaries!
- We may feel in unfamiliar territory w Habakkuk
 - Even name hard. **Hab**-akkuk (UK) Ha-**bak**-uk (US), Habak-**kuk** (chef)!
 - Unfamiliar territory but very helpful territory esp our Covid era.
 - A prophecy from God which helps us address God in the face of suffering. Normally prophecy is a word from God, this is TO God.
- If you've seen 4 min intro, I've given series the title: From “Perplexity to Peace”
 - Start book, questioning [symbolised by questions on lhs]
 - Series of complaints and answers between Hab and God
 - End of book
 - A song, on which Johnny's new song is based.
 - Beautiful passage we chose to have at our wedding.
 - Ending in image of a sure footed deer on the mountain heights.
 - His circumstances haven't changed, but he has.
- But today and next week we're in the wrestling questioning part.
 - Called this first sermon “God what are you doing?”
- It takes us to the theme of suffering and questioning God.
 - I once helped with a week-long mission in a school.
 - A lad asked me “If God is good why does he let bad stuff happen”.
 - It could have been a question any self-confident teen asks trying to trick a Christian guest.
 - but the teacher told me afterwards that this boy's mother had recently died of cancer.
 - For many people today, and certainly for Habakkuk
 - These Qs aren't asked from the sidelines in a philosophical way
 - But from the playing field in a personal way.
 - Today we see first Hab's honest question, and second God's response.
 - Next week we'll see same pattern repeated in a second round of Q&A.

1) Habakkuk's honest questioning: Why are you inactive in the face of injustice?

- v2-3a God's Inactivity
- v3b-4 Context of injustice.
 - In v2 Prayers go unanswered.
 - In v2b People go unrescued.
 - In v3,4 Injustice goes unpunished.
- When all this happens, we question whether God really cares.
- ▲ A few years ago in Bishop Auckland (a town near Durham) a young lad was chased by a mob of 15 youths. He was singled out in McDonalds, challenged to a fight and then chased through the streets of the town. They ripped his Tshirt and Jacket off him, and then hounded him like an animal. Eventually the gang trapped him between the road and a 32 metre drop at the town's viaduct. He was only saved by running into the road and flagging down motorists.

- Now I don't know what was worse: the violence that he suffered, or the fact that during his 40 minute ordeal members of the public completely ignored his pleas for help. Even though the town was crowded with shoppers on a busy Saturday afternoon, when he ran through the streets nobody intervened.
- But the shocking thing about the situation which Habakkuk finds himself in, is that it's not members of the public who are failing to intervene, but apparently God himself. v2.
- Now we don't know the specifics, but among the people of God in Habakkuk's day, there was violence and bloodshed across the land. It may have been during the reign of the evil king Jehoiakim, who we read in 2 Kings did evil in the eyes of the Lord.
- In fact the Hebrew word in v2 is **"HAMAS"** from which the Palestinian paramilitary organisation takes its name. That gives us a flavour for how vicious it was. So Habakkuk cries out to God about this violence, but shockingly, God doesn't seem to listen. Is the God of the Universe turning a blind eye.
- Inactivity in the face of injustice.
- So he asks the age old questions "how long" and "why"?
 - How long will I have to keep crying out?
 - Why do I have to face bloodshed and violence every day, and God you seem to stand by and watch?
- Well can I say, before we move on to look at God's answer, that it is not wrong to ask questions of God. (It may be if it is done in an attitude of disbelief and distrust). But I think Hab's questions are coming from a position of trust
- So application **It's OK to question God's ways. "We can question his hand"**
 - Why do I think he's coming from a position of trust?
 - V12 My God, My Holy One. He takes his doubts to God.
 - He knows God is good, and that's why his apparent inactivity and injustice are all the more painful.
 - If God was a ruthless tyrant who controlled this universe, then suffering wouldn't be a problem.
 - Atheists shouldn't really have a problem with the evil in the world, because if there is no God, why should things be better than they are?
 - But it is the cry of a believer that says "How long O Lord", and "Why O lord". The Psalms are full of these questions.
- One commentator put it like this:

"Many view questioning God as sinful, but Habakkuk and Job show this is not so. Rough passages in life can produce honest doubt and perplexity, and God condemns neither Job nor Habakkuk for expressing these doubts.While an answer might not come immediately, or might itself cause consternation, God does not ban honest questioning" ¹.

- Also if Wrestling with doubt? Read Barnabas Piper's book. "I believe help my unbelief".
- If Covid has brought you perplexity, in the form of a tragic bereavement, family troubles, or just the dislocation of sitting at home alone and being wound up with frustration or brought low with depression, it's absolutely OK to question God.
- And especially if you are facing suffering caused by the others' mistakes right now (perhaps even the violence Hab speaks of in your own neighbourhood or tragically home), you can cry out to God. the Bible has a place for questions, lament, complaint. That won't solve everything, but it can start the journey from perplexity to peace.

Habakkuk's questions.....But amazingly God does answer!

¹ David Baker in "New Bible Commentary" p841.

1) Habakkuk's honest questioning: Why are you inactive in the face of injustice?

2) God's surprising response:

- Wow- we have a speaking God.
 - He sees our sadness in the daytime.
 - He hears our cries in the night time.
 - He lovingly listens to our complaints.
 - And then amazingly, the God of the universe answers.
- I find it very touching that God in fact he answers with some of the very same words Hab has been using. Words like See, Violence, law. God has been listening.
 - v3 Hab has said "how long must I look".
 - v5 God answers, a bit longer. Keep looking. Look at the nations.
- But I wonder if we are ready for his response. **I'm at work in unexpected ways**
 - I want you to see what I'm doing.
 - In fact v6 even now, as you think I'm being inactive, I'm already doing something.
 - Something so staggering / monumental, that you wouldn't have believed it if tried.
 - He is not deaf or blind or inactive or unjust.
 - He has a plan, but it's a very surprising plan.
 - v6 I am raising up the Babylonians
- Let's just pause on that.
 - We don't know exactly when Hab was written.
 - This is the one of the few historical markers in the book.
 - But it seems that Hab lived around 600BC just before the invasion of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 597BC.
 - The days leading up to that time were characterised by the kind of violence that v2-4 speaks of under the rule of bad King Jehoiakim.
- So when Hab sends his questions or complaint up to God, God sends back a message. He draws the curtains back if you like, to show Hab what is happening.
 - I'm bringing local superpower the Babylonians to uproot my people and carry them into exile.
 - What?
 - The Babylonians. Invasion.
 - You get a sense of what they are like in the rest of the passage.
 - An equivalent from recent days would be the Taliban or ISIS.
 - God uses predator language from the animal kingdom to speak of their military might.
 - These Babylonians are **scary** v7.
 - They are **swift**. v8,9.
 - They are **scoffers** (v10)
 - They are **sinful** (v11)
 - God has a solution. But it's not exactly what we might expect.
 - Now all sorts of questions arise out of this: Surely the medicine is worse than the disease? Why is God using an evil people to bring about his purposes? If they are as ruthless and evil as he has made clear they are in v5-11, then surely THEY deserve more punishment than Judah? They are even more violent.
- Well these are exactly the kind of questions that Habakkuk will raise in his second complaint, as we shall see next week.

- I'm not going to give the game away- you can read on to find out what is going to happen.
- But for now, let's stop at the end of this section seeing that God has his own solution, even though it may not be what we would expect or choose. And let's draw out a lesson from where we have got to so far.
- **We must trust God's heart.**
 - We have to trust him. There will be a happy ending in the long run, as there will be a happier tone at the end of Habakkuk (it may not be until heaven, but good news will come).
 - But we don't see that yet, at the end of v11. All we see is a what appears confusing. Bad news met with even worse news.
 - And that is often the way life is isn't it?
 - We pray that the cancer gets better, and sometimes it gets worse.
 - We pray for God's help in a crisis that our teenage children have got themselves into, and another crisis comes along and compounds the first.
 - We pray for a vaccine, and maybe it doesn't work as expected.
 - It's hard. But we have to trust God. You see we don't have all the information yet, and we need to trust him. Sometimes the circumstances look like He is not trustworthy. But he is. It's just we haven't seen everything yet.
 - Sometimes God uses surprising solutions to bring about his purposes. Sometimes he brings more bad news before he can bring about the good news.
- **The cross is surely the supreme example of this.**
- What would you do if you saw a 33-year-old innocent Jewish man being mocked, flogged, whipped and crucified in the streets?
- You'd call out HAMAS, violence. You would cry out for justice, and you'd cry out to God. What are you doing God? Why aren't you doing anything?
- But when Jesus was being arrested and killed God was doing something.
- Peter didn't want to have anything of it, and tried to stop it from happening.
- But far from being inactive, God was saving the world. Anyone who trusts in Jesus and his death for them will be rescued forever, and friends with God.
- The cross shows us that even in unspeakable violence, which he hates, He can be at work. Not condoning the violence, but twisting it for his purposes.
 - God may answer our prayers in a way that we don't always expect, or even like, and we need to be honest with him- as Hab was- but at the end of the day we need to trust him- we need to let God be God. We need to trust Him for our circumstances.
- A few months ago we were praying for someone in our lifegroup who was struggling with their commute. So we prayed for them, that it would get easier.
 - Be careful what you pray for.
 - God answered that prayer with a global pandemic.
 - That's one way to stop having to drive on the A14!
 - I'm being a bit flippant.
 - But there's a serious point.
 - Why would God send a global pandemic?
 - I don't know. For a million reasons.
 - We don't always understand his hand (what he is doing)
 - But we can trust his heart.
 - He is using circumstances that we wouldn't choose, and don't like to bring about his purposes.

- Maybe when person next says if God is so great why did he let Covid happen. You can say I don't know. But it's precisely because he is so good that he let it happen. He can use terrible things like the cross for his glory.
- I was on a zoom call with a bunch of pastors from the Cambridge area last week. As we went around people's prayer points, there were two common themes.
 - 1) everyone is frazzled. They are worn out and so are their churches. People are on their last legs.
 - 2) people are becoming Christians. Nearly every church reported new interest on Christianity Explored courses, individuals asking questions, some even becoming Christians.
- "God what are you doing with Covid?" Answer. I'm at work in unexpected ways. Trust me.
- On this Valentines day, God sometimes uses romance and marriage to bring about his purposes. That's lovely when it happens.
 - Sometimes he uses breakups, and heartbreak and global pandemics.
- The challenge is. Will we let him be God, and trust Him.
 - We cannot always see what he's doing, but we trust him.
 - we can question God's hand, but we must trust God's heart.
 - RECAP- on the screen.
 - LET'S PRAY.