

"Habakkuk's Question, God's Answer"

Text: Habakkuk 1:2; 2:2-4

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Introduction]

The whole life of a Christian is a life of grace.

The follower of Christ lives by grace, in grace, and for grace.

- By grace, because God alone is the source of the Christian life, who forgives you freely and draws you to Himself by working faith in your heart.
- In grace, because God sustains the life of Christ in you through the working of the Holy Spirit in His Word, and in Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- For grace, because we live in Christ to share the grace of God with others.

The grace of God is the central and defining fact of the lives of the people of God.

By it we understand that our salvation depends entirely upon God's character, and not upon our character or our deeds.

In the gray nights of our lives,
when trouble and sorrow,
and frustration and hopelessness burden our hearts
with an unbearable weight of despair,
the light of God's grace remains a sure foundation
upon which we stand in confidence.

However much we fail and disappoint ourselves and others,
however much those around us fail and fall short of our hopes and expectations,
God does not fail.

[Habakkuk]

Six hundred years before the time of Christ,
the prophet Habakkuk looked about him at a society crumbling in corruption.

He saw the courts of law perverting justice.

He saw the powerful crushing the weak and the rich abusing the poor.

He saw the wicked prosper and the good suffer.

In that dark night he cried out to God for relief and begged the Almighty,

"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not listen?" (Habakkuk 1:2).

You know that prayer.

You have prayed that prayer, haven't you? Yes and I have, too.

Habakkuk's prayer is every man's prayer, sooner or later.

I am lonely and heartbroken.

"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not listen?"

I have lost my job and I don't know how to support my family.

"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You not listen?"

There is so much evil and injustice and suffering in the world.

"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not listen?"

My husband ... my wife ... my child ... has died.

"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not listen?"

Habakkuk's prayer is the litany of our lives. "Then," Habakkuk writes (Habakkuk 2:2-4), *"the Lord answered me: 'Write down [the contents of this] vision in plain letters on tablets so that a herald can run [to proclaim] it. [The contents of this] vision will certainly endure until the appointed time. It speaks about the end, and it does not lie. If it [seems to] take a long time, wait for it, for it will surely come [at the right time]. It will not delay. The unrighteous is bloated [with his desires]; his soul is not right within him, but the righteous lives in faith.'"*

God's answer stuns us.

Like our brother Habakkuk, we want an immediate fix.

We want our short-term problem solved and we want it solved now.

But God says, "Wait for it."

Wait for it? How can God expect us to wait for it?

Doesn't He love us?

Doesn't He say in His Word He is like a good Father

who longs to give good gifts to His children when they ask for them?

Doesn't He want to bless us? Hasn't He promised to bless us?

Yes.

God does love you.

God is like a father who longs to give good gifts to His children when they ask.

God wants to bless you. He has promised to bless you.

God wants you to prosper, be happy and healthy
and to have all the good things He has provided in His creation.

God also remembers something of which we often lose sight.
"Man does not live on bread alone" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

All the good things of this life
– things we need and desire and that God wants us to have – are not enough.

God wants something even better for you than health and wealth and happiness:
God wants you to be His own.

God wants even more than that. God wants the rescue of all that He has made and
all that has become corrupted by sin and death through the deceit of the devil.

[Short Term]

Sometimes God's pursuit of these greater goods conflicts with what we perceive to
be our own short-term interests.

Our brother Habakkuk had trouble with that. When he saw the evil and injustice
around him, he prayed for God to make things right. God promised to do just that
by sending the Babylonians to punish Israel.

This answer shocked Habakkuk.

This was a case of the cure being worse than the disease.

The Babylonians were far worse than the evil Habakkuk wanted God to fix.

It didn't make any sense.

It couldn't possibly make any sense until you find out

it was part of God's plan to lead to the cross of Jesus Christ.

The death of Jesus on the cross was God's 'yes' to Habakkuk's prayer.

God asked Habakkuk to trust that God knows what He is doing,
and to walk in faith – to walk in the certainty of God's 'yes' in Jesus Christ –
however long it may seem to be taking.

When you join with Habakkuk and pray,

"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not listen?"

God wants you to know He has heard your prayer, too.

And God's answer to you is always yes:

Yes, in Jesus Christ, God's Messiah born of Mary.
Yes, on the cross.
Yes, in the empty tomb.
Yes, in His ascending into heaven.
Yes, in the giving of the Holy Spirit.
Yes, in your baptism.
Yes, in the body and blood of the Lord's Supper.
Yes, in His coming again.
Yes, in the people of God gathered around His throne in eternal celebration.

Yes, in Jesus Christ, your Savior, through whom God has made you His own today and forever; yes – in Him through whom God embraces you with a love whose steadfastness and certainty overcomes all the hardships, all the trials, all the pain, and all the suffering that remain in this twilight hour between the defeat of sin and death and the devil on the cross and the full revelation of God's victory when Christ comes again in glory.

When you pray Habakkuk's prayer, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not listen?"; when God answers you as He answered Habakkuk by saying that His 'yes' points to the end, that it does not lie, that if it seems to take a long time, wait for it, for it will surely come at the right time. It does not delay, and the righteous live in faith; then, be at peace in the certainty that God's grace is sufficient to see you through every circumstance (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The whole life of a Christian is a life of grace. The follower of Christ lives by grace, in grace, and for grace. Our hope for today and our hope for eternity do not lie in ourselves and in our deeds. They rest confidently in the certainty that the love of God is revealed in Jesus Christ. God's character and God's determination to save us are the foundation of our hope.

In Christ we walk in faith, undaunted by hardship and struggle, "for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." And because we live in God's grace walking in faith (2 Timothy 1:7) we "consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed" (Romans 8:18) in His coming.

In Christ we walk in faith, boldly living by grace, in grace, and for grace, because in Christ we know God has "called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:9).

In Christ we walk in faith, and with St. Paul we declare "I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that He is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to Him" (2 Timothy 1:12).

Jesus Christ, God's 'yes' to Habakkuk and God's 'yes' to you. Amen