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Sermon Notes

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Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire

Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

I. Survival of the Fittest?

- A. Corporate America: Hostile takeovers
- B. Athletics: Stronger, Faster, Higher
- C. Academics: Best and the Brightest
- D. Military Conquest: Nation vs. Nation

All seem to teach one thing: there is no justice, the strong survive and prosper

Habakkuk's problem: where is God in the insane swirl of human history? Is God weak? Is He evil?

Is He bored and disinterested?

How do we reconcile the God of the Bible with the events of history, which seem to teach "survival of the fittest?"

II. Context

- A. Habakkuk's First Complaint
 - 1. Judah Overrun with Wickedness
 - 2. God Doesn't Seem to Care
 - 3. Habakkuk Complains in Prayer
- B. God's First Answer
 - 1. Be Astonished

vs. 5 *"Look at the nations and watch--and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.*

- a. God's ways are sometimes shocking

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. ' "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Habakkuk hoped for some kind of individual punishment just for the wicked leaders... Instead, God is punishing the nation as a whole

Habakkuk probably prayed for some kind of revival, as happened in his youth under Josiah... Instead God is going to destroy the city of Jerusalem and exile the nation from the Promised Land

Our ways and God's ways are so different

- b. Our way of thinking earth-bound

Matthew 16:23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

We constantly think too highly of earthly matters... lands, houses, cities, physical health and prosperity, favorite meals, comfortable beds, pastimes and hobbies; we constantly think too lowly of spiritual matters: God's name, God's glory, God's kingdom, human souls, eternity, heaven and hell

- c. God delights in His sovereignty

God takes great delight in running His universe... His ways seem perverse to us, but they are absolutely wise

God is a shocking God... but we need to be shocked!!

2. Look at the Nations

- a. shock #1: God using GENTILES to discipline Judah
- b. shock #2: GENTILES will destroy Judah... not a mild chastisement

3. I am Raising Up the Babylonians

- a. Hebrew: "Chaldeans"

b. people originating from place of Abraham's origin

Nehemiah 9:7 "You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham."

Land bordering Persian Gulf in modern Iraq right near Kuwait where Operation Desert Storm was fought

The end of the fertile crescent made by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers

Chief city was Babylon... Chaldeans came to be called "Babylonians"

c. history of the Chaldeans

- Originally a group of tribes living in what they called the "Sea-land"
- Assyrian kings from Nineveh conquered them and ruled them for about 250 years
- In 734 B.C. the Chaldeans seized Babylon back from their Assyrian overlords... the Assyrians responded by invading the whole region, but a treaty allowed the Chaldeans control of Babylon itself... one of the Chaldean kings of Babylon was Merodach-Baladan, son of Baladan
- In the time of Isaiah the prophet, when King Hezekiah was got sick and then miraculously recovered, envoys from Merodach-Baladan sent congratulations to Hezekiah from Babylon
- The King of the city of Babylon probably wanted to make an alliance with Judah against the mighty Assyrian empire

Isaiah 39:1-8

At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. ² Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses--the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine oil, his entire armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. ³ Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, "What did those men say, and where did they come from?" "From a distant land," Hezekiah replied. "They came to me from Babylon." ⁴ The prophet asked, "What did they see in your palace?" "They saw everything in my palace," Hezekiah said. "There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them." ⁵ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: ⁶ The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. ⁷ And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become

eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." ⁸ "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime."

- The mighty Assyrians under Sennacherib re-conquered the city of Babylon from the Chaldeans in 695 B.C.
- BUT the mighty Assyrian empire grew weaker and weaker through the 7th century B.C. By 627 B.C., the Chaldeans were strong enough again to re-conquer the city of Babylon and put Nabopolassar on the throne there.
- Nabopolassar was one of the greatest leaders of the ancient world, and led the Chaldeans to a surge of political, economic, and military growth
- Soon it was Babylon that everyone was terrified of, not Assyria
- Nabopolassar moved out to attack the crumbling Assyrian empire, and in 612 he destroyed their capital city of Nineveh with the help of his son, the crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar
- In 605 B.C., the crown prince Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 B.C.
- Soon Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians would turn their attention to Palestine, and to Judah itself
- This was the invasion that Habakkuk warned was coming

So, for a slow period of about one hundred years, the Babylonian empire has been growing stronger and stronger... but in Habakkuk's time, they were still relatively unknown... the real fear had always been the mighty Assyrian empire... that was about to change!!

vs. 5-6 *"Look at the nations and watch--and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.*

4. Implication: Babylonians Will Destroy Judah

vs. 9-11 *they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. ¹⁰ They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them. ¹¹ Then they sweep past like the wind and go on--guilty men, whose own strength is their god.*

III. Habakkuk's Second Complaint: Like the First, Only Worse

A. Overwhelmed with Emotion

vs. 12 *O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.*

1. Habakkuk is now choked with emotion
2. "O Lord...My God, my Holy One... O Lord... O Rock..."
3. Titles:
 - a. Yahweh: God's Covenant Name... idea: how could our covenant protector give us over to our enemies?
 - b. My God: Habakkuk's personal God... Idea: intimate relationship with God, but deep questions too
 - c. My Holy One: God's perfect holiness in view... Idea: how could a perfectly holy God use such wicked men to accomplish His purposes?
 - d. Rock: God never changes, a solid foundation... Idea: has the unshakable foundation begun to crumble?

Malachi 3:6 *"I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.*

God's rock-like qualities David's place of refuge... a Rock is permanent, stable, secure:

Psalms 18:2 *The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

Isaiah 26:3-4 *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.*

BUT... is the Rock crumbling now?

Origin of "Rock": Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32... God gives full history of Israel before it even happened

Deuteronomy 32:29-31 *Would that they were wise, that they understood this, That they would discern their future! "How could one chase a thousand, And two put ten*

thousand to flight, Unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had given them up? "Indeed their rock is not like our Rock, Even our enemies themselves judge this.

B. Understanding God's Purposes

1. Song of Moses makes it clear: the Rock has not changed... Israel is being punished for sin
2. Habakkuk sees it too

vs. 12 O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.

3. God's purposes are to discipline His people for sin
4. God had waited patiently for repentance... but the time is over
5. God's concern in the Song of Moses: that the enemies of His people not think that they conquered of their own might and power!!

Deuteronomy 32:26-27 I said I would scatter them and blot out their memory from mankind, ²⁷ but I dreaded the taunt of the enemy, lest the adversary misunderstand and say, 'Our hand has triumphed; the LORD has not done all this.' "

That is why God sent Habakkuk and other prophets to be His spokesmen... to proclaim clearly that no one could have conquered Judah unless their Rock had given them up for their sins

C. Understanding God's Character

vs. 13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

1. Marvelous statement of God's holiness
2. God cannot even look at evil

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

3. YET God knows intimately every evil deed ever done... or else how could God judge the world
4. Secondly: God CANNOT tolerate wrong

- a. God does not merely shrug and accept evil
- b. God carefully notes it and will punish it
- c. every sin ever committed receives judgment from God

Either at the cross in the person of Christ, or on judgment day and in hell under the righteous wrath of God

BUT if this is so (and it is) a burning question presses forward

D. The Ultimate Question: Why Do You Tolerate Evil Men?

vs. 13 Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

- 1. Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire
- 2. Habakkuk's First Complaint: Wicked Jews who oppress innocent Jews

God seems to do nothing, but merely to tolerate it

- 3. God's answer: I am sending the Babylonians to wipe this city out!!
- 4. Habakkuk's Second Complaint: WHY WHY WHY the Babylonians!!!
 - a. how can God use the wicked to judge the wicked??
 - b. the Babylonians are EVEN WORSE!!!
 - c. they are
 - Idolators
 - Violent
 - Greedy
 - Merciless
 - Cruel
 - Arrogant
 - Godless
- 5. Throughout history... godless nations invade and conquer godly ones

Illus. Vikings attacking monasteries

Attila the Hun, "Scourge of God"

Ghengis Khan

6. Modern Parallels

- a. Nazi Germany's astounding success: 1939-1941
- b. drug lords in USA and South America
- c. abortion system... media, legislators, doctors

E. Sea of Humanity: No Rulers, One Law... "Survival of the Fittest" (vs. 14-17)

Vs. 14-17 You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler. ¹⁵ The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad. ¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food. ¹⁷ Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?

1. Fish in the Sea: No Ruler

- a. food chain
- b. tiny fish swallowed by small fish; small fish swallowed by medium sized fish; medium sized fish swallowed by larger ones
- c. "might makes right", no rules, no laws, only the strong consuming the weak

2. Wicked Foe = Babylon here... but also the wicked oppressors of Israel

- a. when God remains silent, evil seems to flourish
- b. Babylonians like fishermen with their hooks and nets

"Hooks" and "Nets" symbolic for Babylonians military power... cavalry, javelins, chariots, archers, siege ramps, catapults... the state of the art technology

3. Wicked foes delight in conquest

vs. 15 "...and so he rejoices and is glad"

4. Godless sacrifices: he thinks he succeeds because of his own military prowess

vs. 16 Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food.

- a. Babylonians worshipped their own power
- b. arrogant, boastful, full of themselves
- c. the very thing God says he dreads in Song of Moses

Deuteronomy 32:27 I dreaded the taunt of the enemy, lest the adversary misunderstand and say, 'Our hand has triumphed; the LORD has not done all this.' "

The Babylonians live in luxury by military conquest... they steal lands, houses, booty that does not belong to them

Agonized Question: Where is God in all of this????

Is it only "survival of the fittest?" Whoever has the most military power can take whatever he wants?

vs. 17 Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?

How long, O Lord? How long will this go on??

IV. Waiting on God: Seeking Wisdom in an Insane World (2:1)

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.

A. Bewildering History

1. Local history: your own city (like Jerusalem)
 - a. criminals seem to get away with murder
 - b. justice is paralyzed... no matter how you write the laws, someone will take advantage of the law to do evil
 - c. wicked men just seem to prosper more and more
 - d. God seems silent and does nothing
2. Universal history:
 - a. one godless nation after another seems to prosper
 - b. the quiet godly in the land are like doormats, like "sheep for the slaughter"
 - c. God seems to delight in doing the exact opposite of what you'd expect

B. A Promise from God

James 1:5-8 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Habakkuk wanted an answer, and he was willing to wait to get it

He was no "double-minded man"

C. Watching and Waiting on God: Habakkuk's Godly Response

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.

1. Wisdom comes from God
2. He doesn't give is lightly or quickly
3. Habakkuk sets himself to watching and prayer

Matthew 26:41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Prayer: intensely seeking God's perspective on these matters

Watching: trusting that God is the sovereign actor in history, and that events will play themselves out in a way that will prove wise

D. What is the Answer: "Salvation or Sunset for the Wicked"

1. Anticipating God's response in Chapter 2
2. God's Silence is Actually God's Patience
 - a. everything is carefully measured out

Genesis 15:16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure

- b. not one single crime will go unpunished

- c. God is waiting to accomplish His plans... in this case, judgment on the People of God
- d. God's patience is NOT weakness
- e. God's patience is NOT compliance or toleration
- f. God's patience is meant for REPENTANCE

2 Peter 3:15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation

Romans 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance

- g. God's patience does NOT last forever

Deuteronomy 32:35 It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."

Illus. E.V. Hill: "Sunset for the Wicked"... Psalm 73

Psalm 73:16-18 When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.

Judgment comes eventually... "Sunset for the wicked"

BUT that's only half the story... God's patience also means salvation for the wicked

At one point, we were all wicked enemies of God

Romans 5:10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

God's patience works salvation for his people

V. Application

1) **The Mystery of History:** History sometimes makes no sense at all... the wicked seem to prosper; individually wicked men seem to get better and better; godless nations sweep across the earth and grow more and more powerful

- 2) **Holy, Yet Patient:** God hates evil and does not tolerate it... but he is patient toward sinners, waiting for repentance
- 3) **Sunset for the Wicked:** All nations behave essentially the same way, and in the end, God will judge them all
- 4) **Salvation for the Wicked:** God's patience means salvation... but he will not wait forever
- 5) **Living by Faith:** God's people must live by their faith... trusting Him and seeking him, watching and praying