

**IN THE MEANTIME**  
**Habakkuk 3:17-19**

**Dr. Howard Batson**  
**First Baptist Church**  
**Amarillo, Texas**  
**October 2, 2022**

Trouble. One of the common denominators of life. We all, sooner or later, find trouble knocking on our door.

Trouble respects no boundaries – boundaries of race, boundaries of religion, boundaries of age, boundaries of social status or economic privilege. Trouble comes to you and trouble comes to me. Sickness. Hardship. Depression. Disappointment. Divorce. It will sooner or later come to your family, too. Eventually, someone you love is going to die.

It is so easy for us to understand when difficulties darken the door of those who have no place for the Lord in their lives. Such situations seem to simply be explained by the cause and the effect. “The cause is their sin. The effect is their suffering”. Their sin has found them out.

But when we, as God’s people, begin to suffer, we find – stuck in our throat – the hard question that will not be swallowed away. “Why? Why, God, do your people suffer?”

When I see suffering come to God’s people, I’ve asked that question many, many times. “Why this one? Why now, God? Why?”

Surely you’ve asked God that question as well. If you haven’t, you will.

When I was teaching at the Uganda Baptist Seminary, I began to informally interview the pastors and ask them their stories. One pastor’s name was Sam. He said God called him to pastor a people in a particular village. He began a new work. He began a new church. And he said that for six months, as they gathered together every Sunday to worship, he and his wife were the only two who came to church. He preached to his wife. For six months. If preaching to one wasn’t discouraging enough, during that time – those difficult days of beginning a new church – their two-year-old child died and was buried in the midst of their already dark depression. Pastor Sam was having some difficult days trying to serve God. He was in a moment of despair.

We can respond to the despair in our lives in different ways.

**First of all, we can choose to become bitter and resentful, declaring that there is no fairness to be found in the world created by God.**

We can insist on holding God accountable and decide that because of His unfairness, because He has abandoned His people to suffering, that we are going to throw our faith away.

**Perhaps Arthur Gossett said it best. “When faith comes hard, there are some people who fling faith away. But,” he declares, “in heaven’s name, fling it away to what?”**

Perhaps some of you are there this morning. You are ready to throw your faith away.

We have a similar scene with would-be disciples in John 6. After hearing the demands of the gospel story, some disciples began to drift away from Christ. He turns to the twelve apostles and asks in John 6:67, “You do not want to go away also, do you?”

And Peter proclaims the truth as he says, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know you are the Holy One of God.”

Peter makes a point. While we are tempted at times to throw our faith away because of the suffering in our lives, to whom would we turn? Christ alone has eternal life. Christ alone has the answer.

We can choose to become bitter. We can choose to become resentful. We can choose to throw our faith away when faith comes hard.

**Secondly, we can choose to keep our faith even when faith comes hard, even in the midst of trials and tribulation.**

That’s the position that Habakkuk took in his book. The Babylonian army was pressing on Judah, God’s people, in the sixth century B.C. Habakkuk could not understand why these evil and godless people were getting the “upper hand” over God’s own people. Notice Habakkuk 1:1-4.

Habakkuk is a book for those who live “in the meantime” – the time between the revelation of God’s promises and the fulfillment of those promises, the time between when God made His purpose clear and the final time when that divine purpose will be realized upon all the earth. Habakkuk is a book that calls God’s people to walk by faith.

Look at Habakkuk 2:4.

But the righteous will live by his faith.

One of the most quoted passages from the Old Testament in the New (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). It’s a faith that lives in a world not as it ought to be, but as it is. Not as it will be, but as it is.

Habakkuk faces the dilemma that confronts the faithful people of every age – the dilemma of unanswered prayer, the dilemma of suffering.

Look at Habakkuk 1:2

How long, O Lord, will I call for help,

And you will not hear?

I cry out to You, “Violence!”

Yet You do not save.

**It is the faith of the people who are asking God how long and why. It is the faith of people for whom faith comes hard. It is the experience of everyone who prayed for healing beside a sickbed only to be confronted with death. It is the prayer of every spouse who prayed for love to come into a home and only found hatred and anger. Habakkuk the prophet typifies the faithful person of God who has to live in a world as it is and who has grown weary with the world's ways of wickedness. (Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum-Malachi*, p. 36)**

Why, O God, do bad things happen to your people? Look at the second part of verse 13 of chapter 1. "Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?"

Sometimes, congregation, faith just comes hard.

### **I. When faith comes hard, I want you to realize that God's ways are mysterious.**

Look at Habakkuk 1:5  
Look among the nations! Observe!  
Be astonished! Wonder!  
Because I am doing something in your days –  
You would not believe if you were told.

In fact, God says He is raising up the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, to punish His own people for their sins.

God's ways are mysterious. Our assessment of the situation may not always be correct. God's methods are beyond our understanding. God is working even when all seems to be disaster.

The book of Isaiah declares, "As the heavens are high above the earth, so are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts your thoughts." We can never fully understand the mind of God while we are on the earth. When we demand an understanding of everything that is happening, we're demanding that which is impossible, that which is not always ours to hold.

When we know something about the marvelous workings of God, the power of God, and the majesty of God, it drives us to humility, and to faith, and to say, "Lord, I can accept the fact that you know more than I know, and I will keep believing in you even when I don't understand." Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, "Now we see through a glass darkly, then we shall see as face to face. Now we know in part, then shall we know even as we are known."

There are two words that appear twice in that verse – "now" and "then." "Now" we see through a glass darkly; "then" we shall see as face to face. "Now" we know in part; "then" we shall know even as we are known. We shall know completely. He is contrasting our knowledge now with our knowledge when we find ourselves in the Kingdom of God.

The knowledge that we have of God, ourselves, and our universe today is comparable to a man looking in a mirror. In our day and time, you can look into a mirror and get a fairly accurate reflection. In fact, mirrors are so accurate they are cruel. But in the first century, the mirrors were polished metal. At best they gave a distorted, imperfect image. When a man looked at himself in the mirror, he didn't see a perfect reflection. Paul said our knowledge today is like a man looking into one of those polished pieces of metal. It gives us a distorted view, an imperfect view of what's going on. And one of these days we shall see things as though we were face to face with them.

Now we can know just a part of what's going on. We can know just a little bit of God's working. But then we shall know completely and fully. We shall know even as we are known. What's he's saying is that God's ways are above us, beyond us. And if you don't know what's going on, welcome to the club. Nobody does. And if you demand to understand, then you are demanding that which is beyond your capacity.

So, since God is God, keep on believing in Him. He knows more than we.

We ultimately always have to trust Him.

Vance Havner was a Baptist evangelist. **He told a story about an elderly lady who was greatly disturbed by her many troubles, both real and some imaginary. Finally she was told in a kindly way by her family, "Grandma, we've done all we can do for you. You'll just have to trust God for the rest." A look of utter despair spread over her face as she replied, "Oh dear, has it come to that?" Havner commented, "It always comes to that, so we might as well begin with that!"**

## **II. When faith comes hard, we need to realize God does not work on our timetable.**

God is not working on our timetable, but He is working. In a society where all the signs seem to read "Men at Work," Habakkuk sees a vastly more impressive sign, "God at Work." In fact, Jesus told the Jews, "My Father is working, and I am working" (John 5:17).

God is at work – though He may not be at work on our timetable. God is not pressed by your wristwatch, nor by your calendar. The history of humanity is the history of reducing time to smaller and smaller segments. We used to be satisfied with months, and then weeks, and then days. Then we got it down to hours and minutes and seconds. And now there are some drag races on television where they have reduced the time to 1/1000 of a second.

God told Habakkuk that when He was ready to remedy the situation, He would do it. So just keep on believing.

I realize that patience is never easy. Someone defined patience as "the ability to idle your engine when you feel like stripping your gears." We all struggle with patience. But let me assure you this morning that God is at work in this world, but He's not going to be rushed by you, and He's not going to be rushed by me. He's not going to allow us to impose our own impatience upon Him. We have to trust Him, even though He's not working on our timetable.

I think about Joseph – sold into slavery, cast into prison. A man misunderstood by his family, falsely accused by his employer’s wife, and forgotten by his friends. At any point along the way, Joseph could have given up in despair and said, “There is no justice in this world. God is not working. I ought to be out of jail. Everything ought to be all right, but it isn’t. I quit. I give up.” He could have done that. But if he had, he would have walked out of the play before the final act. Because God did eventually deliver him from prison. He elevated Joseph to a place of prominence, the second in command in the land of Egypt. And God made him the means of delivering His people in a time of distress. It is only because Joseph could be patient and wait on God that great things were accomplished.

We have to wait. Wait for God to put the pieces of the puzzle together. Wait for God to do His work on His own timetable.

Sam, the Ugandan pastor, despite his despair and despite the death of his child, continued faithfully conducting church. And now he has about 30 individuals – the average size of a church in Uganda – gathered together each Sunday worshiping God. They are about to build a building. Sam could have given up on any one of those Sundays. He could have walked out and said, “Nobody is showing up but my wife.” But he did not.

God works in God’s own timetable.

### **III. Even when times are difficult, praise the Lord.**

Look at Habakkuk 3:17-19. Judah was an agrarian society. She depended upon crops and herds to survive. But our author says, “Even when the fig tree is fruitless, even when the flocks fail, I will praise the Lord. For He is my God, both in times of joy and my God in times of sorrow.”

For some of you this morning, God is your God in times of joy. But for some of you this morning, God is your God in a time of sorrow. A time of suffering. A time of despair. A time of depression. A time of death. A time of divorce.

But you must still praise Him.

It is so easy to praise God, to see the goodness of God, in times of ease, in times of peace, in times of prosperity. It is the real man of faith, it is the real woman of faith, who has the ability to praise Him, to trust Him, to rely on Him when things seem hopeless. We are all asked to trust Him, to put our total weight upon Him.

**It [was] a difficult day for Habakkuk. Destruction and violence still mar his community. Strife and contention still arise. Nations still rage and devour those weaker than they. The arrogant still rule. The poor still suffer. The enslaved still labor for emptiness. And false gods are worshiped in the earth. But Habakkuk knows who is working His purpose out, unseen, behind the turmoil. And Habakkuk now knows what the end of it all will be. And, therefore, he sings a magnificent song of trust that we find in Habakkuk 3:17-19. (Achte-meier, p. 58)**

Habakkuk is setting forth the faith of those who “live in the meantime” – that time between the “now” and the “not yet” of Paul.

What about you this morning – you who suffer, you who hurt? Can you join Habakkuk in his song, even though your soul is full of sorrow instead of music?

**When John Paton was translating the Bible for a South Seas island tribe, he discovered that they had no word for trust or faith. One day a native, who had been running hard, came into the missionary’s house, flopped himself in a large chair, and said, “It is good to rest my whole weight on this chair.” “That’s it,” said Paton. “We’ll translate faith as ‘resting one’s whole weight on God.’”**

How about you this morning?

**It was a bright, clear morning. A large crowd had gathered at Niagara Falls to see the famous Blondin walk over the perilous falls on a tightrope. The sun glistened on the cascading torrent as it rushed over the cliffs. From below came the ceaseless thunder of the plunging cataract.**

**Blondin saw his first rope-walker at age five when a traveling circus troop camped near his home. He strung up a makeshift rope between two chairs and started to practice. Orphaned at age 9, he began performing professionally. He was the first man to cross Niagara Falls by tightrope - the crossing was 1100 feet and was 160 feet above the falls at one side and 270 feet at the other. Every time he crossed the Falls, he thrilled the crowd. He balanced a chair on the rope and stood on it. He took pictures of the crowd while he balanced on the rope. He even cooked a meal on a small portable cooker. He crossed blindfolded, on stilts, in a sack, and pushing a wheel barrow. Once he even crossed at a performance for the Prince of Wales who begged him to never do it again.**

**You name it, he was the best daredevil you had ever seen. His final performance was given in Ireland when Blondin was 68 years of age. He lived to be 73 and died peacefully of diabetes.**

**On this particular day, the world’s greatest tightrope walker briefly tested the taut strand that reached across to the opposite bank. Then he took his long pole and, balancing himself expertly, started across. The crowd followed every movement tensely. Step by step he moved forward. The people on the shore reacted nervously to every sharp motion of the balancing pole. But their fears and forebodings were unnecessary. The great Blondin not only went across safely, but returned as well – to the great relief and admiration of the spectators.**

**Turning to the audience, he then made a sensational and unbelievable offer. He would cross the falls again, this time with someone on his back. Who was willing to go? No one rushed forward to accept the offer. Picking out a man at random, Blondin asked, “Do you believe that I am able to carry you across?”**

**“Yes, sir,” came the unhesitating reply.**

**“Well then, let’s go,” Blondin urged.**

**“Not on your life!” – and the man withdrew into the crowd.**

**And so it went. One after another expressed great confidence in the tightrope walker, but no one would agree to let Blondin actually take him across. Finally, a fellow moved forward to the front of the crowd. Blondin repeated his question: “Do you believe I can carry you across safely?”**

**“Yes, I do.”**

**“Are you willing to let me?”**

**“As a matter of fact, I am.” The young man climbed onto the expert’s back. Blondin stepped onto the rope, paused momentarily, then moved across the falls without any difficulty.**

**There were many in that crowd who believed that Blondin could do it. But there was only one who was willing to trust him to do it.**

All of us here this morning pretend to believe that God really can walk us across the suffering, the sorrow, and the pain in our life. But there are few of us – really few of us and it’s hard to be in this group – very few who are actually willing to climb on board and actually trust God to walk us across our pain, our suffering, and our loss.

Ours is a call to trust God to carry us, even when it means a journey across the raging waters of life.

**Yes, truly the word is sure: The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is at work, fulfilling his purpose. His Kingdom comes. And “in the meantime” and for evermore, the righteous shall live by their faithfulness. (Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Nahum-Malachi*, p. 60)**