

I see that the Australian tennis player Nick Kyrgios is about to take on a mentor. It's interesting that this person is a mentor, not a coach. Even so, his role will be to coach and support Nick. In view of Nick's recent mental attitude, the appointment of a coach/mentor is a good thing. Far too often, Nick seems to have lost his way.

A coach is helpful when things go wrong. With tennis players, maybe they're not hitting the ball properly. Or, the ball toss for the serve is not right. The players themselves often cannot see what's causing their problem. A good coach makes a big difference. The problem is often solved by the player going back to what was learned in the first place. Recalling and practicing what was studied so carefully in the beginning, can often improve their game.

We have a similar kind of problem to the professional sports men and women. Just like them, we can lose our way. Moreover, we cannot always solve our problems. This happens especially when we face life's difficulties. So, I suppose, if we're honest, it often happens to us. In addition, it becomes doubly hard, when our prayers don't seem to get answered. That's where Habakkuk helps us.

Our difficulty is that we cannot see life as a 'big picture.' We're caught up in our small corner of the world. Often, we cannot see things from God's point of view. Just like Habakkuk, we cry out (1:2) ***How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen... you do not save?*** Praise God, in the Bible, and especially in Habakkuk, we can see behind the events of our everyday life.

God's timing is central to Habakkuk's message. Habakkuk began with the cry ***How long?*** But after making several complaints about life, Habakkuk knows that he must wait. 2:1, ***I will stand at my watch... I will look to see what he will say to me.***

And so, at the centre of this book, waiting on God to act, is important. Note 2:3a, where God speaks, ***"For the revelation awaits an appointed time."*** In typical Hebrew poetic form, the Lord God repeats this, and then adds to His word to Habakkuk. 2:3b, ***It [God's revelation] speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and not delay.*** God will ultimately right all wrongs. This is what Habakkuk must proclaim.

Meanwhile, God calls upon His people to wait, with patience and with faith. Near the end of the book of Habakkuk, in 3:16b, we see him trusting in God's faithfulness. ***I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.*** Thus, this book takes God's people from confusion and despair to clarity and hope. One commentator writes, we move 'from fear to faith.'

We can easily put ourselves in Habakkuk's shoes. He has been concerned about the sinful lifestyle of the people living in Judah. 1:3b, ***Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife and conflict abounds.*** With increasing violence in the world, we too are concerned. Even within our own city, violence worries us.

But Habakkuk was horrified by the Lord's plans for sinful Judah. God would send the Babylonians to overrun them. And they were more wicked than Judah. Habakkuk even challenges God's wisdom in this matter. Note 1:13, ***Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?*** Habakkuk is wrestling with God. How can He possibly use a wicked nation to judge His own people?

In Genesis 18 Abraham pleads with God for Sodom, the wicked city. Abraham doesn't give up. Yet only Abraham's nephew, Lot, and his three daughters were saved (19:30). During Israel's exodus from Egypt, Moses pleaded with God for his people, many times. Yet many died. So too, Job questions God's ways. Yet each one of these three men trusted in God's sovereignty and faithfulness.

Do you follow what I'm saying? Like the saints of old, we're called to trust in God's mercy and grace. So too, we trust in His faithfulness; His sovereignty and His providence; His care for His creation. The Bible teaches us that God knows all things. At any point in time He knows the past, the present and the future. And, He knows our hearts, even what we're about to say and do.

But, we are to wrestle with God in prayer. Jacob wrestled with God (Genesis 32:22-32) and wouldn't give up until God blessed him. The Apostle Paul spoke of his *constant prayers* for the people in the church. In Colossians 4:12b Paul writes about Epaphras, a man of prayer. ***He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in the will of God, mature and fully assured.***

Having wrestled with God in prayer, then, like Habakkuk we must wait. Habakkuk 2:1, ***I will stand at my watch... I will look to see what he will say to me.*** God graciously gives His prophet

Habakkuk a vision [*revelation*] of the future. How long would it take to come about? As far as Habakkuk is concerned, he doesn't know.

Habakkuk 2:2, ***Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it."*** That Habakkuk is to *write... on tablets* reminds us of God writing the Ten Commandments (Exodus 31:18). Jewish tradition notes that the 613 laws in the first five books of the Bible have been reduced to one in Habakkuk. This law is found in Habakkuk 2:4b, ***The righteous will live by his faith.***

So important is this message that Habakkuk is given the responsibility of proclaiming it. Yet it's clearly not for Habakkuk alone. The word translated *herald* can also mean *so that whoever reads it* (see margin of the NIV). Down through the ages this message is at the heart of God's word. It began with Abraham in Genesis 15:6, ***Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*** In the New Testament faith and righteousness are again linked together, in Romans 3:21, ***This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.***

However, we cannot limit this revelation to Habakkuk with just part of one verse (2:4b). Listen again to 2:3, ***For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.*** This revelation to Habakkuk speaks about the future, which is declared to be certain.

Abraham believed that his wife, Sarah, would have a son and heir. His birth would be ***at the appointed time*** (Genesis 18:14). God's faithful promises would come true. However, Abraham had his doubts. For, when he received the promise he was about 86 years of age. His son, Isaac, wasn't born until he was 100 years old.

Habakkuk must have wondered why God's promise to His people began with their being overrun by the Babylonians. Yet, like Abraham he had to trust that this revelation would be fulfilled at the ***appointed time***. He was also told that this time, ***speaks of the end***.

For Habakkuk's people there would be an end when the treacherous Babylonians would be overrun. But before that happened, God's people would spend about 70 years in exile, in Babylon. After that time, a faithful remnant would return to the land of Israel.

Even so, the final resolution of the problem for God's people has another end in mind. And so this verse speaks to us. We Christians await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Hebrews 9:28, ***Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*** The return of the Lord Jesus will bring on the Day of Judgment. Finally, we look forward to the new heaven and the new earth.

I'm sure that you have many questions about the Day of Judgment. But I don't want to focus today on the return of Christ. Other occasions will suit that topic better. At the same time, let's not undervalue the return of the Lord. For, we long to see Him and we long to see His justice on this earth. We eagerly await the new heaven and the new earth. An end to suffering and evil is our heart's desire. But, like Habakkuk, we must wait. 2:3b, ***Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.***

Habakkuk didn't know how long to wait. We don't know exactly when the Lord will return. From our point of view, it may seem to be too long. However, from God's perspective His plan *will* be fulfilled and cannot be questioned. Like Habakkuk, we must be patient, and wait. And so we read in Hebrews 10:37b, 38a, ***"He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith."***

The substance of Habakkuk's vision (revelation) is in 2:4, 5. 2:4, ***"See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith..."*** The first part of this verse gives us God's analysis of the proud. (In the first place, this refers to the Babylonians.) They are ***puffed up***, bloated with their own self-importance. Here is the contrast between those who are righteous and those who are not. It's the difference between believer and unbeliever. The proud ***are not upright***. So their future lies in condemnation and judgment. We could add, 'their time will come.'

2:4b, ***But the righteous will live by his faith.*** These words are a watershed in God's revelation.

This is how Francis Schaffer describes the meaning of 'watershed.' Picture a high, snow-covered ridge of land. The snow seems to lie there in unbroken unity. But that's an illusion. As the snow melts one part flows down into the valley on one side of that divide. Snow which lay close beside it, melts and flows down into another valley. In Switzerland, as Francis Schaffer sees it, the river in one valley flows down into the Rhine River. It then flows out into the North Sea. The other river, in the other valley, flows

down to the Rhone valley and into Lake Geneva. Finally, it flows into the Mediterranean Sea. These two seas are far apart from each other.

Going back to Habakkuk, the watershed is 2:4. The wicked (a word that Habakkuk uses in 1:15) are *puffed up* and live crooked lives. They are not *upright*. And so the contrast is made between them and the godly. For, *the righteous will live by his faith*.

The word *righteous* is a legal word. In the Old Testament, behind its use lies some matter that's settled by a judge. It's not important whether it refers to right living (a moral quality) or our status before God. At the heart of it is judgment. It's a legal term.

The question for us is, 'How do you and I come to be declared righteous?' Is there anyone who can stand before God and be declared absolutely guiltless?

2:4b once again, *the righteous will live by his faith*. The words *by faith* are properly connected to the words, *will live*. This appears to leave open the question as to how one can become righteous. But, true righteousness is always outside of us. No good deed can make us righteous. Righteousness is a legal term. It's God's declaration that we're in a right relationship with Him. O. Palmer Robertson notes, **If continuing life is a gift received by faith, then righteousness that is the basis of life must have the same source.**

And so Habakkuk 2:4b echoes Genesis 15:6. *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness*. The *righteous* of Habakkuk 2:4b are 'justified [= declared righteous] by faith' just as Abram was justified by faith. In other words, God declares that you are in a right relationship with Him through faith.

In Habakkuk you and I are called upon to 'live by faith.' So, life does not come through good works. If that were the case, then we'd be no different from the proud who are *puffed up*. Rather, as Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8, 9, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast*. John Calvin writes that this faith **strips us of all arrogance, and leads us naked and needy to God, that we may seek salvation from Him alone, which would otherwise be far removed from us.**

In the New Testament, Habakkuk 2:4b is used by the apostle Paul as the single phrase on which to base his letter to the Romans. He first quotes it in Romans 1:17, *The righteous will live by faith*. In Galatians 3:11 he writes, *Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."* Paul is saying that the faith Habakkuk speaks of is trust in God for salvation.

In Habakkuk 1:12 the prophet's frustration is summed up in his cry to God, *we will not die*. But then God's revelation in 1:6-10 offered Habakkuk little hope. Israel appeared to be lost. But the Lord has other ideas; *the righteous will live by faith*. O. Palmer Robertson concludes, **'The justified by faith continue to live by faith'**.

Many biblical moral and ethical issues in our country are under attack. The attacks on our Christian faith frustrate us. As Christians we often wonder why God did not hear our prayers. In our own lives, we wonder why God so often appears to be silent. So let us remember Habakkuk. He was passionate in his request that God answer his prayers. But he was also moved by the holiness of God. And then, God's answer to him was, *wait*. Wait for the end which *will certainly come and not delay* (2:3). Meanwhile, Habakkuk was to write down God's revelation.

Like all of the Scriptures, it has been written down for us. We read in 1 Corinthians 10:11, *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come*. In Jesus Christ the end has come. One man writes, *'The countdown has begun'*. Meanwhile, the meaning of life and our right relationship with God flow from commitment to Him. *The righteous will live by his faith*.

Habakkuk points out to us that there are two ways to live. You can live like the Babylonians. But, relatively speaking, their time is short. You can try to be good enough for God. But you'll fail. Or, you can learn the lesson that God taught Habakkuk; *the righteous will live by faith*. Thus, two paths lie before you. Basically they are belief and unbelief. This is God's watershed. Friends, I pray that you choose the path of faith that leads you to the Lord Jesus Christ.

How can we enter into a right relationship with God? The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 4:5, Paul, *to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness*. Think of it in this way. The Lord Jesus never sinned. His death on the cross was the one

true sacrifice for our sin. When God declares that we're righteous, Christ's perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in His death and resurrection. Christian friends, God now sees you as He sees His Son, righteous.

When the Lord Jesus commenced His ministry He began it with these words in Mark 1:15, "***The time has come,***"... "***The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!***" We are to turn away from sin, and, in faith, receive Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

Unlike sports men and women, you don't need a coach. You need the Lord Jesus Christ. You don't even need someone to point out your faults. Read the Bible and you'll find them for yourself.

But you do need someone to take you back to the beginning, to a life that is in a right relationship with God. Both you and I need the Lord Jesus Christ. Only by God's grace, through faith in Him—His death and resurrection—can we know real life. This is eternal life, forgiveness of our sins and peace with God. This is resurrection life. It is the message that you and I must proclaim. Amen