

Are you familiar with Aesop's Fables? They're stories that also have a moral application. One that's relevant for us this morning concerns the fox and the grapes. One hot day, the fox was feeling very thirsty. He saw a bunch of grapes hanging high up in a tree. 'Just the thing to quench my thirst' he said. But, try as hard as he could, he was unable to reach the grapes. Having failed, he walked away saying, 'I'm sure they were sour.' According to Aesop, the moral is this story is: **It is easy to despise what you cannot get.**

Sadly, many people treat God in the same way. When they're in trouble, they pray. But, when nothing happens, they say that God doesn't exist. Or, they say that He may exist but doesn't care. The Australian journalist, Terry Lane falls into the latter category.

Terry Lane was training for the ministry (in another church). During his course he couldn't reconcile suffering and the goodness of God. Whatever faith he might have had, he lost. Strangely, for many years now, he has found it hard to stop talking about God. But, if you don't believe in something, why keep talking about it? Philip Adams, another atheist, is the same. Perhaps even more so than Terry Lane, Philip Adams cannot stop talking about God.

Well, what do you do? You see the suffering that's in the world. We see people suffer in our own country. And, most probably, many of your prayers are unanswered. You wonder why God allows bad things to happen. When you pray for God to intervene, you wonder why He doesn't. You've never seen Him. Furthermore, we pray for revival. But then you wonder why He doesn't revive His church.

Consider Habakkuk's position once again. Habakkuk complained that God was slow to answer him. 1:2, 3, **How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?... Why do you tolerate wrong?** Then, when God tells Habakkuk that He'll send the Babylonians against them, Habakkuk is horrified. We hear his horror in 1:12, **O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish?** How could God use a people more wicked than Judah to punish them? After all, the Babylonians were certainly more wicked than Judah.

God's answer is summarised in 2:4, 5a **"See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith—indeed, wine betrays him."** The rest of chapter 2 is taken up with how God will bring down the one who is **puffed up**. The Babylonians would be punished. Meanwhile, the righteous live by faith. The one who knows God will live by faith in God. This is the heart of Habakkuk's message to us. Times may be bad and things may get worse. But, the righteous live by faith in the One who is worthy of our faith. Chapter 2 ends by saying (2:20), **But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.**

In Psalm 46:10 we read, **"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."** This is not a command to rest or to enter a cave and meditate. It's a result of God ending all hostilities, recognizing that God is sovereign over all of history. And, it's a call to faith in God, to know Him and praise Him. We read further, in Psalm 46:7, 11, **The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.** This is our God, who has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5b).

What is our frustration? Like Habakkuk, we don't see an end to war. We don't see an end to poverty and disease in the Third World. We don't see the end to Christians being persecuted. In recent weeks many lives have been lost because of fire and flood. And thousands have died in war. Why doesn't God intervene?

One day, I was watching a Chinese movie. A man, inside his own house, was fighting another man. Suddenly, the first man's son rode on his tricycle into the room. Immediately, both men ceased fighting. Sadly, they began fighting again as soon as the boy left.

We need another son to enter the room, God's Son. For, His return will bring in the new heaven and the new earth. Listen to 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.** But, those events are in the future, on a day we cannot predict.

So, like Habakkuk, we must wait. But note the way in which he waits. He doesn't 'throw in the towel' [= give up]. Instead, he turns to God in prayer and worship.

We have a lot to learn from Habakkuk. In our times of trial, his attitude is one for us to adopt and make our own. Listen again to 3:2, ***LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.*** This seems to be a simple verse, but it demonstrates to us the right way to approach to God.

The first way to approach God is with *humility*. No longer does Habakkuk argue with God. He doesn't question God's ways, as he had at first. Nor does he make any further protest about God's judgment upon Judah. Earlier, his prayer had been that Judah didn't deserve severe punishment. For, the Babylonians were a cruel race of people. Now, he submits to God's will. ***LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds.***

There has been a development in Habakkuk's faith. At first his focus was on the problems in Israel. Then he began to compare the sins of the Jews with the wickedness of the Babylonians. Now, his eyes are on God. He sees things very differently. Before him now is the righteousness and holiness of God. With his renewed concern for the glory of God, he has stopped making comparisons.

His vision of ***the LORD in his holy temple*** has shifted his focus. From such a spiritual viewpoint, we can only confess (Romans 3:23), ***All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** God's holiness and our sinfulness are the only things that matter.

Have you come to see your need for humiliation? Each day we're confronted by the sin of the world. And, if we're honest, we're confronted by our own sin. Is your attitude to this still, 'Why does God allow this?' Or, 'What have I done to deserve this?' If so, then you haven't learned the lesson that Habakkuk learned.

Do we have any right to complain when God's judgments come upon us? Have we any right to protest? If we answer yes to those questions then we do two things. Firstly, we deny God's sovereignty and His providence. As someone once said, history is His Story. We see in Habakkuk how God rules over history. At the same time, God provides for His people. Secondly, we're still in a state of denial over our own sin. If we protest our innocence, then our God is too small. We have lost sight of His holiness and our sin.

What can we do? It's as if we need to change our glasses. Let us take off the glasses that make comparisons with others in our favour. Let us put on spiritual glasses. With them we see our sin and our need for salvation. We see our need to confess sin and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. For, with these spiritual glasses we're confronted with the holiness of God.

We cannot come to God saying, 'I know I'm not perfect, God, but *I'm better than* Bill Smith or Mary Jones, You should listen to me. After all, I'm a Christian and I give generously...' Come with that attitude and you'll have an ineffective prayer life. So, come with an attitude like Habakkuk. He learned to pray, 'It's only by grace that I can pray. Lord, it's only by grace that I can enter Your presence. At your invitation, O Lord, I lay my petitions before You.'

You may have been a church member for many years, taught Sunday school, sung in the choir, or even been an elder, but God is under no obligation to answer your prayers. If we remind God of our goodness then we're praying in our own name. You and I cannot make those kinds of claims upon God. God is not our debtor.

Yet there is a claim you can make: that Christ Jesus died for you on the cross. He has paid the price for your sin. United to Christ, and only in Christ's name, do you and I have any grounds to come to God in prayer. If we're to see revival in the Christian Church it will only happen when God's people humble themselves. We read in 2 Chronicles 7:14, ***If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.***

Secondly, approach God with *adoration*. ***LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds.*** Habakkuk is at worship. [The word *shiggioneth* is hard to translate. It's thought to be a musical term. Later, the word *Selah* (also untranslatable) is another musical term.] Worship is acknowledging God's true worth. And so Habakkuk stands in *awe* of God. This is not fear. He has no fear of the suffering that is to come. God has revealed His plan to him. He has meditated upon God's Word and God's presence in His holy temple. Now, he comes to God with reverence and godly fear.

A useful acrostic to help us pray is **ACTS**: ‘A’ for adoration; ‘C’ for confession of sin; ‘T’ for thanksgiving; and ‘S’ for supplication [= petition, our requests to God]. Rightly, adoration comes first. It’s the most important and so we want to spend the most of our time in adoration of God. But what happens is often quite different. We rush through the first part in a hurry to present our requests. This isn’t very effective. Our requests have become more important than our worship. We find that we tend to centre more on our needs and desires. Our prayers will not be God’s desires. Focussing on ourselves is not a godly approach to prayer.

Instead, focus on God, on His attributes, His qualities. Focus of His mighty acts of redemption; how He has saved His people in the past and in the present. Begin with a reading from the Bible. Then, in praise and adoration, respond to what God has said and done. Do that and you’ll find your requests change. You’ll be more in line with God’s will and His desires. And, you’ll find more of your prayers are answered.

We read in Hebrews 12:28, ***Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.*** It’s easy to become far too familiar with our holy God. Yes, we come into His presence with *holy boldness* through the blood of Christ. But, we must always come with reverence and godly fear. Thus, we read in Hebrews 12:29, ***For our “God is a consuming fire.”***

So, we are to come into the presence of God on His terms. One thing then stands out, His holy nature and our sin. Rightly, we humble ourselves, and with reverence worship and adore Him.

Thirdly, approach God with your *petitions*. Habakkuk’s petitions are far different from what he was saying a few chapters ago. 3:2b, ***I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.*** There are two petitions. The first is that God would renew His deeds. Secondly, that God would remember mercy in His time of wrath.

Habakkuk prays for God to act once again for His people. Gone are thoughts of his needs and desires. There’s no petition for ease or for deliverance. Judah deserved what was coming to them.

In effect, Habakkuk prays for revival, a new work on God’s part. Revival means to make alive something that was dead. We have the New Testament idea of that in 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*** Before coming to know Christ you were spiritually dead. New life comes to you, i.e., you are born again, in Christ. In other words, the spiritually dead area made alive in Christ.

Earlier, Habakkuk wanted God to change His mind regarding the Babylonian invasion. Now, he knows that God will begin a new work instead. Notice how Habakkuk phrases the first part of his petition. ***Renew them in our day, in our time make them known.***

Revival often comes in bad times. The Reformation, in the early 16th century, came when the Church was in bad shape. Alexander VI had been the pope of the Catholic Church. He filled the Vatican with his illegitimate children. All across Europe the Church was in a bad condition. People were superstitious and ignorant.

Then, God had mercy on His church. He raised up Martin Luther (and others). At first, Luther had been terrified by the righteousness of God. But then, he came to understand that *the just will live by faith*. Centuries earlier, Habakkuk had the same fact revealed to him—the righteous live by faith (2:4).

As a Christian, what is your main concern? What worries you most? Is it the events in the world around you? Or, is it the name and the glory of our Almighty God? Habakkuk had only one concern, the revival of God’s cause in Israel.

‘Revival’ also has the idea of preserve, or to keep alive as well as to purify and correct, to get rid of evil. Thus, in the history of every revival God has purified His Church. He gets rid of sin, all that hinders [= holds back] His cause.

God also prepares His Church for deliverance. Habakkuk’s final appeal in 3:2 is simple, and it touches our hearts. ***In wrath remember mercy.*** He doesn’t complain about their coming punishment. Nor does he try to diminish the sins of Judah. Instead of reminding God of their merits, he asks that God, in His wrath, remember mercy. In the face of Judah’s sin, he can only ask that God would act according to His character and remember mercy.

Let us remember that God is the God of mercy. When we pray for mercy, even in the day of wrath, we pray for that which is central to His character.

The Lord Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector (Luke 18:9-15). The Pharisee was proud of his great spiritual achievements. In the temple, he prayed, (Luke 18:11b-12), '**God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.**' But the tax collector was aware of his great failures. He would not even look up to heaven. He prayed (18:13b), '**God, have mercy on me, a sinner.**'

The Lord Jesus has summarised Habakkuk chapters 2 and 3. The Pharisee is *puffed up*. His *desires are not upright*. On the other hand, the tax collector is the *righteous* man who *lives by his faith*. His prayer is: *In wrath remember mercy*. It is this man who, says the Lord Jesus, goes home *justified* (Luke 18:14).

The message of Habakkuk is that we must humble ourselves and see ourselves as God see us. We must confess our sins and commit ourselves into His hands. Until we do these things we have no right to peace and happiness.

This applies to the Church as a whole, but especially to us as individuals. Ask yourself, 'Is there something in my life that deserves God's wrath? Am I what I ought to be?'

When things go wrong reflect on the state of your soul. Ask, 'What is God saying to me and doing to me? What am I to learn through this experience?' Finally, commit yourself to God. Pray that in His justice, He remembers His mercy and that He will use you for His glory.

That was Habakkuk's new attitude and it's true of all of God's prophets. It's also true of the Church when God brings about revival. Think less about whatever threatens the Church. Be more concerned for her health and purity. Above all, be concerned about the holiness of God and the sinfulness of this generation.

Habakkuk 3:2, **LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.** Amen