

**Authentic Living – Major Themes from the Minor Prophets
When God Doesn't Make Sense (Habakkuk)**



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Over the last 10 weeks we have been looking at the Minor Prophets. Those smaller books near the end of the Old Testament, which, despite being their age are amazingly relevant to where we are living today in Calgary. This has been an amazing journey hasn't it? Let me give you a 2 minute reminder of our Journey.

Hosea:

Deals with the question, "how much does God love us?" You may remember that this was the story of a preacher whose wife kept having affairs, until the story zooms in on this amazing scene of Hosea, after years of betrayal by his wife, whom in the end was left standing in a slave market. At this time Hosea bought his broken and helpless wife back. Hearing him say 'No more will you live like you have, for we are going home and will begin again, for I love you'. As we look on in amazement (especially those of you who have experienced rejection and unfaithfulness from those you love) you hear God say 'by the way that is how much I love you and never forget it'.

Joel:

Gave us that amazing promise of what can happen in Churches if we let God have his way among us *Joel 2:28, 29*

Amos:

"What happens if we keep living contrary to God's teachings?" Do you remember Amos was the preacher that set up his Israeli audience by preaching about how God would deal harshly with all their neighbors. He had them amending in the pews, especially when he spoke about what would happen to Judah and their stuck up religious neighbors. Then when they thought the sermon was over, he turned to them and reminded them that just because they are doing ok financially doesn't mean God is pleased with their actions. He reminded us that because God is holy and just, that not only does he expect us to live right as believers. But that if we live outside of his commands we will fall short of his blessing and reap the results of our wrong actions.

Obadiah:

Was that 23 verse book that answered the question "what happens when others hurt us deeply?" He reminded us that because God is just and when others hurt us or hurt others, and that if we place those pains and those actions of others in God's hands He will make sure Justice happens. That means we don't have to get even and we don't have to let the poison of wanting to get even, effect our lives. For God promises that in this world and the next, justice will happen.

Jonah:

Teaches us that it isn't that clever to try and run away from God. For God is willing to chase us clear across the world so we can turn our heart back to Him and allow us to experience the best that He has for us. Now Jonah would add to those who

struggle with how God at times seems unfair and unloving to nations other than Israel. For us to remember that God had sent Jonah to bring a revival to Israel's enemies. Why? God loves everyone in the world!

Micah:

God answers the question "What does God want from us?" His answer was 1) To Act Justly (work at making Justice happen) 2) To Love Mercy (to care for the poor) and 3) To humble your self before our Lord.

That brings us to the last book we will be looking at in the Minor Prophets, the book of Habakkuk. Let me set the book up with this story. When I was in grade 10/11 my best friend was a Métis boy named Blake. We hunted, trapped, fished together and hiked together. Blake and his family were the first people to become a part of the church my dad had planted in Grand Cache. Then one day we received a phone call from the RCMP, they told us to jump in the car and head out of town because their had been an accident. Blake's family had been heading out of town, and as they drove down a stretch of road with the sun blazing brightly into the windshield, his dad had not seen a grader in the middle of the road and ended running right into it. His dad died on the scene, his mom was badly hurt and so we took by friend and his sister to stay with us for awhile. That day shattered Blake's life, and he ended up moving away, that day probably had an influence on Blake as he spent years struggling with alcohol. I can tell you as we sat and cried together that evening as 2 buddies I wondered where was God in all of this. Was he absent? Didn't he care? Was he not able to do any for them?

Honestly, I wondered what was wrong with God. Now I can tell you that when they did the autopsy they found out that Blake's dad had lung cancer that they hadn't known about. I can tell you that because they were driving another person's car they received some insurance money to help them out. But what happened still, as far as I was concerned stunk and made we question that if God was a loving God how could he let this happen to my friend. When I say that, I am sure some of you here who have lost a child, buried a husband, suffered with cancer or have watched the news from Haiti or Japan have asked similar questions. We want to know, where is God when things go wrong or why me, why does stuff happen that makes no sense at all. I believe if you haven't asked that question yet in your life, then every one of us will hit a place where that question rattles our back teeth. Know that you are not alone. *Psalm 13:1* 'how long Lord, will you forget me forever?' *Psalm 77:1, 7 – 8* 'I cried out to God for help, I cried out to God to hear me, will the Lord reject me forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promised failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful?' Have you been there? Habakkuk was. Turn to *Habakkuk 1:2*

The date is between 620 – 605, The Assyrian Empire is close to the end of it's reign (Nineveh has fallen in 612 BC) and the Babylonians are knocking on the door of Judah. In 605 BC at the battle of Carchemish, Egypt is beaten by the Babylonians and they swing past Jerusalem and take Daniel and other young people captive. Things are getting harder financially and because of that Habakkuk decides it is time he has a heart

to heart talk with God. This book tells a story of Habakkuk and God wrestling with the issue, what do you do when you are asking where is God when stuff happens that don't make sense?

Question and Answers with God:

Question #1

Habakkuk grabs his courage and asks God a question. *Habakkuk 1:1-4* (message) He is saying God, I don't understand what your problem is, the wheels are falling off around here. For not only is the enemy coming near but here at home there are huge wrongs going challenged. Violence and injustice is everywhere, the law seems paralyzed, and people in our country are claiming to be believers but are doing horrible things. God why don't you intervene? God why don't you show a little discernment and judgment, stick up for the down trodden and step in 'hem in the wickedness" (NIV)? God where are you, and why are you letting these terrible things go without any intervention on your part?

God's Answer:

Habakkuk 1:5-11 God responds "Glad you asked, don't worry Habakkuk, I've got it covered, and although you probably won't like my answer, I am on it and I will be using the Babylonians to swoop in and destroy those who are doing all these terrible things to these good people". Stop, you don't want to miss what God has just shown Habakkuk and us. He is showing us that while we are going through the tough stuff and that we may think He is not at work. That if we could only see the larger picture we would be able to see that he is already busy at work, putting things in place, so that justice will be played out and that actually, as we speak He is getting ready to step into our situation and make a difference or walk with us in that trouble. In other words, God is saying "Habakkuk, despite how it may appear, I already have a plan and I am ready to make my move, so trust me. Don't forget this passage. When you feel God isn't near or isn't interested in the pain and situation that you are going through, do not worry for He is with you always. Here is proof, that even when he may feel far away to you, he is actually preparing to take that step, which is his promise.

Question #2:

Habakkuk 1:12, 13 "God, you're from everlasting, aren't you?" Are you sure I am talking to the right God here, Habakkuk is almost asking. "Is there anyone else up there I can talk to (ever felt like that?)? Surely, this isn't how you are going to answer my request for a little judgment, is it? Hang on we could all die here. God, surely you aren't going to use the Babylonians (they are evil, brutal beings, they are the enemy) who have come to judge us (your people). Surely you have this all wrong, don't you? Here Habakkuk sits, where many of us have sat, when it comes to what we think God should do. For sometimes we are sure that God doesn't seem to be getting it right from our point of view. And try as we might, we can't seem to figure out how a loving God, who loves us as his children. Judah was God's favorite people, and Jerusalem was God's city in which the temple stood. So how could He allow these things to happen? We sit back and watch these horrible things happen to our children, our spouse and at

times ourselves. And try as we might, we cannot get our head around these things and to be honest, it seems harder to get our heart around those things.

God's answer:

Habakkuk 2:2; 4:5 "Note well, money deceives" *Habakkuk 2:6* "Who do you think you are, by stealing and extortion. *Habakkuk 2/4:9-11* "who do you think you are?" *Habakkuk 2/4:15-16* "who do you think you are?" God's answer is simple, "Habakkuk, when you asked me to deal with the sin in your land, you had read the situation well, it needs to be dealt with. For 'when they thought they were having the time of their life, they were wrong, it was actually a time of disgrace". Therefore I need to act." It strikes me that after hearing God explain some of the why's behind his action, that Habakkuk understood to a point why God was acting like he did. And he still struggled with God's actions. When we see cancer strike a loved one or hear of the horrible things in Japan at the moment often we know that part of the answer to the WHY question is that we live in a sinful world, sin to the fallen. Sickness and death become's a part of man's existence, we see sin lived out in evil men's actions and so rape, abuse, touching of innocent people, people are letting sin rule there lives. Creation has also been affected by the fall, earthquakes happen in nature, and if you build a city upon those fault lines disaster can happen. Both are valid answers that help, but they only help a little, for God is a loving God. He does have the power to intervene, and so we end up like Habakkuk, saying, "God even when I understand a little of what you are doing, I am still at a loss to know how to process what I am feeling, or how I can keep on trusting you."

Habakkuk 3:20 Habakkuk sits in silence for a while and then He decides to hang unto what He knows. *Habakkuk 3:1* He says in prayer (on shigionoth, with an orchestra in the background) He writes this last chapter as a prayer, set to music which people could sing when the answers don't come to them and they need to hear again what to do. The first 16 verses in Habakkuk are simply a restatement of times when Habakkuk had heard of when God stepped into peoples lives (often Israel's life as a nation) and showed his love and miraculous care for them. In *Habakkuk 3:2* he says 'I have heard about your fame and I stand in awe of your deeds". As we walk through the chapter he mentions the power of God as a creation, the freedom of Israel from Egypt due to the plagues God sent, and times of God's care in the desert. Also, the escape across the Red Sea, the time when the sun stood still during a battle in Joshua's time and the time the land of Canaan was taken. Quite a list! Why did he need to do this? Don't forget that Habakkuk knew that if God came in judgment again to Judah. He personally would also have to go through this tough life altering change and probably time of suffering. This wasn't just for them; it was for Him as he was doing this. In the making of the list he realized that, as he looked at God's past actions in the lives of his people, that God owed no one any explanation for his actions. For God had over time consistently proved he was a loving, caring and ever present help in time of trouble.

For as he took this larger perspective he realized that God had no need to prove that he cared, that had long since been established as he looked at God's track record in the life of Israel and in his life as a person. His first comment to us is, when you are wondering if God really cares, take a moment, even when you are going through the

tough stuff, start writing down the things God has blessed you with, is in the process of, and in your past blessed you with. How he has shown his care to you, been there for you, now look at them and they will help remind you that because the promise of scripture is that 'God is the same yesterday and forever'. That you can carry forward into your present situation hope that comes from your past experience with God.
Romans 8:35-39

He decides to Trust! Then Habakkuk makes a decision and it is one of the most profound statements in all of scripture. For if the fig tree doesn't bud, the grapes don't grow on the vine, the olive crop fail and the sheep pens are empty. He has painted a picture of the entire range in an agricultural society imploding. What he is saying is that there will probably come a time in everyone of our lives when due to illness, loss or depression, that even after looking at all the things we have seen God do in our lives and the lives of others. That we can't think, push or use positive thinking to get our way into fighting through questions like why me, where were you God or how could God allow this to happen to me or someone else. He says that is when you have to decide to make a choice, to tie a knot between you and God and decided to trust, decide to hang unto him and decide to hold on in faith to your God. That is when the books theme verse comes into action *Habakkuk 2:4* 'the just (righteous) will live by his faith'.

Do you remember the story in *Daniel 3:16-25* when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were being dragged into the fiery furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar's soldier (Babylonian Emperor) 'We believe God can save us' they had confidence in God's power to miraculously intervene in their lives. "Though even if he does not, we want you to know that we will not bow down before your idol, we will still trust in our God", an amazing faith that came from a decision to tie their faith to God and trust Him. Then we read *Daniel 3:22-25* Here is the promise, that even when God doesn't show up as we had thought he would, He will still show up for there was Jesus walking with them in the fire, and they were not alone. Did you know that this happened only a few years after Habakkuk was written? I wonder if part of their courage came from reading *Habakkuk 3:17-19* for what they said mirrored his words.

Habakkuk's strategy needs to become our strategy when we have those times when God's actions, our life situation don't seem to make sense.

- 1) We decide to hand unto what we know
- 2) We make a decision to trust

Marilyn Stiles

"Lord, why don't you heal me? I cry out in the dark of the night. My tears flow freely at this hour of the day as I know that my husband Todd and children Ashley and Darren are fast asleep. The house is quiet. The physical pain torments my joints and the fluid in my body makes it hard to breathe. Then without fail, I feel peace that rushes through me, a peace that passes understanding. I feel the Fathers comfort wash over my body. I know without a shadow of doubt that all is well as He has me in His grip. I am not alone.

My journey with chronic illness began 21 years ago as Todd and I buried our still born daughter. After delivery, I had serious complications that continued to plague my body. We then had two healthy children but endured seven other pregnancy losses. The journey of autoimmune disease had begun. The years that followed were some of the most challenging years, with surgeries and hospitalizations. Days of being at home, often in bed, followed. A year and a half ago my physician suggested to Todd and I that we begin to think about end of life issues as my medical struggles continued to become relentless. Church friends gathered in prayer. They blew us away with a love offering to go to the Mayo Clinic. We went, full of hope for a cure. We actually received a great assessment which matched the opinions of my Calgary medical team. But all was not lost as we did receive a great deal of practical suggestions to make each day easier. No magic cures were meant to be. We returned home and asked God, now what? He gave us the answer, it being something I already knew, it was up to me to make a choice, a decision.

- 1) To kick and scream and become bitter or
- 2) To choose God despite the real possibility that His plan for me was to live daily with chronic illness.

My ways are not your ways He would often remind me. Would I still love Him and be obedient? Yes! You see I reached a place of contentment; it was a journey to get there. I must mention God allowed us to mourn and grieve. I still at times do. But I know without a doubt that He mourns and grieves right along with us. That is truly a great comfort! My goal each day is to be filled with Joy, with His peace! How do God and I do life in the midst of living with chronic illness?

- 1) Some days ~ 'God I don't like this, this really sucks! Give me your grace'
- 2) Worship Him ~ Prayer, count my blessings. Think of all the ways why I Love Him
- 3) Care for others ~ Making phone calls, providing meals
- 4) Support and Prayer from our fellow believers. Our Church family support has been overwhelming. We are so very blessed.
- 5) Active Prayer Warrior ~ I would love a real neat spiritual gift but God allows me the gift to pray for others. That, I can do from bed if I have to and I often do so. Recently, we have been so blessed that two prayer healing services were organized on our behalf. The last one, Todd and I felt a heaviness that God was saying No or Not Yet. Will I still love Him? Will I trust Him to get me through the days? I am still alive and expect to be for awhile yet. I do think that my chronic illness will continue to be the thorn of my side. I would like to share with you my life verse which is so special to me:

Psalm 73: 25-26

Whom have I in Heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.

My prayers to God are often like this:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that you are the great physician and healer. I may not understand Heavenly Father why you have chosen me to journey this path of illness. I would like to be healed Lord. But if it is not your will for me Lord. I trust and accept your plan. I love you and I will serve you all of the days of my life. I know I can do all things through you who give me strength. May I be obedient to you, my King! In your Holy name I pray. ~ Amen ~

Many of us know the story of Joni Eareckson Tada who was paralyzed in a swimming accident and became a quadriplegic. She tells this story: Honesty is always the best policy, but especially when you're surrounded by a crowd of women in a restroom during a break at a Christian women's conference. One woman, putting on lipstick, said, "Oh, Joni, you always look so together, so happy in your wheelchair. I wish that I had your joy!" several women around her nodded. "How do you do it?" she asked as she capped her lipstick.

"I don't do it," I said. "In fact, may I tell you honestly how I woke up this morning? This is an average day," She breathed deeply. "After my husband, Ken, leaves for work at 6:00 a.m., I'm alone until I hear the front door open at 7:00 a.m. That's when a friend arrives to get me up. "While I listen to her make coffee, I pray, 'Oh, Lord, my friend will soon give me a bath, get me dressed, sit me up in my chair, brush my hair and teeth, and send me out the door. I don't have the strength to face this routine one more time. I have no resources. I don't have a smile to take into the day. But you do. May I have yours? God, I need you desperately." "So, what happens when your friend comes through the bedroom door?" one of them asked. "I turn my head toward her and give her a smile sent straight from heaven. It's not mine. It's God's. And so," I said, gesturing to my paralyzed legs, "whatever joy you see today was hard won this morning."

So when we have those times when God's actions in our life situations don't seem to make sense.

1. We decide to hand unto what we know.
2. We make a decision to trust.