

How Long, O Lord? – Kait Mathews

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Psalm 37:1-9; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10

David Guzik gives us insight into the name **Habakkuk**—which is actually derived from the Hebrew verb “embrace.” The meaning of his name most likely means, “He Who Embraces” or maybe “He Who Clings.” Either meaning is suitable for the prophet and his book, for it is in this short book we witness Habakkuk embracing and clinging to a steadfast faith as he struggles with tough questions. Habakkuk witnessed and cried out against the violence and injustice that was surrounding him in the nation of Judah.

The NIV Study Bible explains, “At this time Judah was probably under King Jehoiakim, who was ambitious, cruel and corrupt. Habakkuk describes the social corruption and spiritual apostasy of Judah in the late seventh century B.C.” Habakkuk focuses on wrongdoing, trouble, destruction and violence, strife, contention, slack laws, and never-prevailing-justice. He sees both the macro and micro level of sin surrounding him. He sees it every way he turns, causing him to question God’s presence within his midst. Habakkuk wants judgement from God to rain down, and he wants it now. Have you ever been there? Ever thought that? Maybe even prayed that?

In the midst of the hurting, social corruption, and spiritual apostasy, Habakkuk cried out, “Where is God? Why hasn’t he answered my prayers? Why must we be plagued with the burden of seeing wrong-doing and trouble in ourselves and in others?” We all have asked these questions in our own lives, family, work, school, church, neighborhoods, nation, and our world.

We see the injustice in front of us every way we turn, causing us to question God’s presence within our midst. Injustices like the fact that in 2017, 537 kids between the ages of 0-17 in Bond County are living in poverty. Where is God? Injustices like the case of Deandre Somerville, a 21-year-old black male, who was arrested for sleeping through jury duty and sentenced to 10 days in prison and 3 months’ probation. When I was 21 years old, I was summoned for jury duty, missed it without knowing, but laughed it off with a person from the court office. Why hasn’t God answered my prayers? Injustices like an estimated 20 to 40 million people—men, women and children—caught in modern-day slavery. Why must we be plagued with the burden of seeing wrongdoing and trouble in ourselves and in others?

God gives Habakkuk—and us—an answer. God can indeed hear our cries for help and our question, for He is a God with us. His provision is different from what we think we need at times though. He reveals (2:3-4): *For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.*

God’s answer is not what we really want to hear though, is it? We don’t want to wait. We don’t like to wait. In fact we often question having to wait. God declares His plan will surely come and that it will not delay. If we are being completely honest, are we sure that we actually believe Him—especially when we find ourselves in the midst of waiting?

If we look at Psalm 37, verse 7 it states, *Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.* We must be mindful of the psalmist's use of the verb "wait", or in Hebrew, *chul*. *Chul* means much more than our traditional thoughts of waiting as, "staying where one is or delaying action until a particular time." This leads us to read Scripture with a mindset of us just passively waiting around. Maybe we pray about it, but ultimately we expect God to simply deliver us blessings without us doing anything. Not that He can't do that, but the Scriptural definition of *chul* is in direct contrast to the dictionary definition. *Chul* actually means "to whirl, dance, or writhe." This definition calls us to do something in the waiting. It is active—not passive.

When it feels we are surrounded by wrongdoing, trouble, destruction and violence, strife, contention, slack laws, and never-prevailing-justice, we need to *chul*. We need to get active and do something about it. It is not enough to sit around waiting, we will become overwhelmed and discouraged. Habakkuk himself, after crying out for help from the Lord, stated, *I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint.* He is waiting, while being in his watchpost—aware and confident that God was going to respond to his cries for help.

What situation are you in the midst of, waiting on? In what ways are you actively waiting for God to answer? Where is your watchpost that you need to stand at?

God's instructions to Habakkuk were not just to wait, but that the righteous live by their faith. In our Gospel passage, the Disciples shouted (17:5-6): *"Increase our faith!" The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."* Jesus contrasts the magnitude of His great works and our small faith. It is beautiful to think that God uses the smallest of things to create something magnificently significant. Creation begins with a spoken word. A banquet for thousands emerges from five fish and two loaves. The Church begins with twelve ordinary disciples. Freedom from sin emerges from the sacrifice of One.

Even with the smallest amount of faith, God can do great things. But when we think that our faith is too small, we can cry out to God and plead, "Increase our faith!" What great things has God done with your small faith? Or are you in a place where your faith is wavering?

As you are thinking about the injustices that are plaguing your soul, do you need to cry out, as the disciples did, "Increase my faith"?

As we are thinking about the injustices that are plaguing our world, do we need to communally cry out, "Increase our faith"?

Through learning to wait and crying out to God to increase our faith, we can embrace and cling to God as Habakkuk did. This is still a vision for the appointed time, and it will surely come.

Amen.