

“Longing for Yahweh to Act!”—Habakkuk 1:2-4

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Longing for Yahweh to Act!”, is Habakkuk 1:2-4 → *O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear? Or cry to You “Violence!” and You will not save? Why do You make me see iniquity, and why do You idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

In 1988 I attended the Great Commission Convocation in St. Louis, Missouri. Before making the drive back home on Sunday I wanted to find something special to take home for my wife and two sons. Driving from store to store I discovered no department stores open. I experienced what has been called “blue laws” which prohibit most stores from being open on Sunday. I am told that even in North Dakota today most stores are not open until after twelve noon on Sundays. This is evidence of the early part of the last century when the church influenced our culture.

Over the years we have experienced the unfortunate shift in which the

church no longer informs the culture. Censorship laws in media seem to be virtually non-existent—or at the very least, minimal. I hear people decry the violence in our culture, watching injustice flaunted before our eyes daily, almost forcing us to view immorality on every level. I've heard comment upon comment of the perverted concepts of "justice" where it appears the criminal has more rights than the victim. The cry of many is "How long?" "How long do we have to put up with this violence?" "How long will it be until justice is served?"

This is similar to the prophet Habakkuk's cry to Yahweh in our text. The difference is that he was not just talking about what he was experiencing in his culture but what He was experiencing in the Church—God's people functioning as **His people** in the promised land. The difference is this: One would expect such sinful action amongst people who have no regard for God's law as they live in the darkness of sinful satanic delusion. One does not expect such behavior from those who have been redeemed by God's grace and established as His treasured possession to display His Will as they follow His Word in the world. God expects His people to act like **His** people in the world and not act like those who are of this sinful world!

Thus, Habakkuk's burden was even heavier as he watched Yahweh's children assimilate the world's sinful ways rather than bringing the unique

presence of Yahweh into the sinful world in their daily vocations of life. His cry was filled with grief over the LORD's people and their idolatry in all its forms! The suffering was heightened by the oppressing actions of the Assyrians as well.

The first aspect of his prayer longs for Yahweh to act on behalf of His people to deliver them in the midst of the violence they were experiencing. *O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear? Or cry to You "Violence!" and You will not save?* (cf. verse 2) It is the prayer of a child of God longing for Yahweh to act with His salvation and help in the midst of violence and destruction. Many people turn to the LORD in the midst of suffering, seeking His deliverance and help. It could be a faith response to His promise in Psalm 50:15 → *Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.*

As Habakkuk sought Yahweh he seemed to express some impatience, wanting to personally be delivered from having to watch this sinful behavior continue with no boundaries, repercussion or just intervention. *Why do You make me see iniquity, and why do You idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.* (cf. verse 3) It is the cry of many a Christian who longs for the coming of Jesus on the Last Day to bring about divine judgment and deliverance.

However, what does a person have in mind when his prayer goes up to the LORD longing for Him to act in his life? Are we looking for deliverance from suffering to continue enjoying a comfortable life on earth? Are we desiring self-preservation so that our lives can stay “intact” so we can continue to function “normally” in business and relationships? Certainly we would not be seeking the LORD to take away all of our possessions, our homes and our property, would we? Actually, Yahweh’s answer to Habakkuk’s cry for deliverance was that Yahweh was sending the nation of Babylon to take their possessions, land and property and deport them to Babylon into captivity! (cf. Habakkuk 1:5-11) More violence and destruction?! And that from the hand of Yahweh? What’s up with that?

Remember, God expects His people to act like **His** people in the world and not act like those who are of this sinful world! The issue wasn’t the violence, injustice and destruction. The issue was the sinful hearts which took advantage of God’s grace, spurned His Law and continued in unrepentant disobedience to His Word. The issue was idolatry. Habakkuk described it in verse 4 of our text: *The law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.* Those striving to live according to God’s Law were persecuted by those who were claimed by His grace as His people! Thus, God’s Law was *paralyzed* as His people

decided to do things their own ways.

Habbakuk's contemporary, the prophet Jeremiah, experienced this persecution so intensely that he went so far as to say to Yahweh in Jeremiah 20:7 → *O LORD, You have deceived me, and I was deceived; You are stronger than I, and You have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me.* They even conspired to take his life because he was warning the people of this chastisement of Yahweh in the midst of their idolatry by the upcoming Babylonian captivity!

Where is the Christian Church today from the perspective of these prophets? Aside from editorials, blogs and "official positions" of denominations today where is the Christian Church in the midst of an amoral society where every disobedience of God's Law is flaunted in the name of "being Christian?" I have also heard criticisms of pastors, church leaders and congregations for not banding together under a common cause to take stands to combat the onslaught of our unchristian culture. I hear calls for prayer in institutional religions across the world to call upon "God" to intervene, acting to bring about change for a moral culture. Where is the Christian Church in the midst of it all?

It is in all the day to day workings of the world in the various vocations of your life. You are the Christian Church in the midst of it all. The Christian Church is not some faith-based institution of society. It is the presence of

Christ in society through you! This is why Yahweh's priority in the midst of people's longing for Him to act is to act in bringing them into a proper relationship with Himself again. The purpose of His allowing this sinful world to continue is described in 2 Peter 3:9 → *The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise*—that is, of coming back again on Judgment Day to defeat the last enemy of death in the bodily resurrection and bring the restoration of all things in the new heavens and new earth . . . *The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, **but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.***

It's a matter of bringing us to confess our sins, receive His absolution, that is, complete forgiveness in Jesus Christ, and be His Church in the world each day. The Christian Church is constantly looking for Yahweh to act with His grace in our own lives in worship, receiving these means of grace regularly. The Christian Church is in the world as you fulfill your vocations as employees, supervisors, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, citizens, congregational members, team members, and so forth. The Christian Church is not in the world to wield some kind of influence on it's values and morals. It is in the world as the incarnational presence of Jesus to bring the heart-changing, life-renewing Gospel of Jesus Christ to others as we strive to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ in those godly vocation we fill each day as His

people!

So, instead investing so much time and energy analyzing our current cultural milieu . . . instead spending so much time trying to “draw” people into the congregation . . . instead of criticizing our leaders and bemoaning the deplorable state of affairs in our culture . . . let’s long for Yahweh to act today in our own hearts as we come to him in repentance and faith. As He acts let’s ***go** therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us, as His incarnational presence in the world because He is with us always, to the end of the age.* (cf. Matthew 28:19-20) Let’s trust His Holy Spirit to act in the hearts of others as we fulfill our godly vocations in the world, pointing them to Jesus Who said in John 12:32 → *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, **will draw** all people to Myself. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!* (cf. Revelation 22:20)

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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