

I got my first pair of eye glasses when I was ten years old. Much to my Dad's chagrin, I was continually breaking them or losing them. On one of those occasions when he'd replaced them yet again for me, I complained to my father that I couldn't see with the new glasses. That only irritated him more. But finally after a day of complaining and refusing to use them – I couldn't see out of them – and though I was blind as a bat, that was better than those glasses that were impossible to see out of.

Finally, in total exasperation, my Dad says, "Let me see those things" and he snatches up my glasses and looks through them...and he finally understood. Somehow the optician had mixed up the order and instead of filling my prescription; they had mistakenly given me my Dad's prescription, minus his bifocals. Looking back the name of the place should have been a warning to us. The name of the optician was *Digby's*. I mean what kind of name is *Digby's*? I don't think I'd eat at a restaurant named *Digby's*. You certainly don't want them working on your eyes. *Digby's* – that should be a well drilling outfit, not an optician.

Last Sunday we studied the prophet Habakkuk's lament, his cry out to God – "*How long O Lord?*" And now in verse 5, Yahweh answers. But as God Himself acknowledges and Habakkuk later is going to respond, it's as if God heard the wrong prayer, as if He confused what Habakkuk had requested with someone else's request. No wonder Habakkuk is scratching his head. God, **Did You confuse my prayer with someone else's?**

Though Habakkuk was engaged in typical Jewish lament and was asking essentially rhetorical questions, God answered his complaint. The Lord was neither indifferent nor insensitive. God was not sleeping at the switch, nor was He idle. He was already at work on specific plans to discipline His sinful people, the nation of Judah and He now reveals those plans to the frustrated prophet but it wasn't the answer that Habakkuk wanted to hear.

Turn again to Habakkuk 1:1-11 (p. 662). Verse 5 begins God's answer to Habakkuk. We're focusing on that section this morning. If you're taking notes...

**1. God's sovereignty over history continually astounds us, vs. 5, "Look at the *nations* and watch— and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told."**

The change in speakers is obvious from the verbs, "*look*" and "*watch*" which in Hebrew include the plural "*you*" and "*you*." God is addressing both the prophet and the people. Habakkuk had lamented, he'd complained about being made to look at violence and injustice in Judah, but the prophet and his people suffer from spiritual myopia. They are focused on their own circumstances and situation. God immediately moves Habakkuk's focus onto the big picture, a world view "*look at the nations.*"

The hoped for answer would be God's intervention and salvation, instead God's response is judgment. It's not that God is ignoring Habakkuk's please for help; it's that God knows that the answer to Habakkuk's prayer is for Him to display His justice and righteousness by sending judgment where it belongs. Habakkuk wanted to know what God was going to do about the wickedness in Judah, so God tells him. The Lord's response both amazes and frightens the prophet.

God told Habakkuk that He was at work. Here's the amazing fact, especially for our world – God is at work. Many question whether God even exists and they certainly don't believe that He's at work. According to some neuroscientists, what people call "God" is little more than brain chemistry. In a world that only considers that humans are at work, God works. Alongside the "men at work" signs stands another much more important sign: "God at work." God is far from being an unconcerned spectator in our world's affairs. We can be confident that if our hearts are distressed over the prevalence of sin and ungodliness, God is all the more repulsed and distressed.

Remember back in verse 2 Habakkuk had prayed, "*How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?*" I wonder if God had delayed His answer to His prophet because He knew that Habakkuk couldn't handle it. The delay in responding to Habakkuk's prayer was because of God's tender love for His prophet. Before we dig into this text, will you bear with me as ***I confess two of my own problems here?***

***\* I have a major dilemma when it comes to Biblical prophecy.*** I bleed red, white and blue. I love America. Several of our family vacations have been to historic places: Washington, D.C., The Liberty Bell, The Statue of Liberty, Mount Rushmore, etc. Some 30% of our Bibles are prophecy and yet, there is no mention and as far as I can see, no allusion to America in God's prophetic future. The only conclusion seems to be that our country will be just one more passing world empire in the plan of God...and that is very hard for me.

It's apparent that Habakkuk, too, loved his country. He had a Star of David flying in front of his home. It may well be that God out of compassion withheld from Habakkuk His plans that He knew would cause great distress to His prophet. And what I'm going to say next is not an easy admission but...

***\* I find that I am tragically apathetic about much of the world.*** There are nearly 7 billion people in our world. It's estimated that there are 56 million deaths per year. That means that there are over 150,000 deaths per day. And I have to be honest, for the most part, I really don't care. That means that every four days, a population as large as the city of Milwaukee dies and goes into eternity. Like Habakkuk, I am far too concerned about my little world and struggle to get a handle on God's bigger picture and worldview. But as a believer, I cannot succumb to spiritual myopia.

Yahweh responds by directing Habakkuk's attention from local concerns to the international stage. Biblical truth confronts us with the fact that God started history, God controls history and God will ultimately end history.

Turn back a few pages to Isaiah 46:9-11 (p. 518), *“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.”* God is the God of history and God’s people are to take refuge and comfort in this fact that things do not happen by accident. God is doing something.

**a. God desires for all of His people to get the message.** God responds to Habakkuk’s complaint with great force. In His answer to Habakkuk He employs four plural imperatives to make His point because this message is not just for Habakkuk but for all the covenant people. The ESV brings out these imperatives in a clearer fashion. Here’s how it renders it: *“Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing something in your days that you would not believe if told.”* **Look, see, wonder and be astounded.**

**Look** – the Lord is simply telling them to open their eyes and see what is really happening in the world. God doesn’t want His people to put their heads in the sand but to be aware of what is going on around them. **See** – the word means to give a careful, sustained and favorable contemplation. In other words, the Lord is telling His people not just to view the world rightly, but to think about it as well.

Are you a thoughtful Christian? Too often we get so busy about things that really don’t matter that we fail to take the time to just think, to deliberate or contemplate and meditate. We need time for self-examination and world-examination, for pondering the eternal questions. Some wise wag said, *“The probable reason that some people get lost in thought is because it is unfamiliar territory for them.”* Oswald Chambers encourages God’s people when he says, *“To think is an effort; to think rightly is a great effort; and to think as a Christian ought to think is the greatest effort of a human soul.”*

**Wonder** carries the idea of someone stunned or dumbfounded. Have you ever been so stunned by something that it left you with your mouth wide open in silence? Wonders like the Grand Canyon, the birth of a child, an unexpected sizeable gift – can stun a person to silence. With the last imperative God calls on His people to **“be astounded.”** God is telling them that they are to be dazzled and amazed.

Remember that Habakkuk had been questioning whether God is working because injustice and violence are rampant in Judah. God is answering His prophet with a resounding, “Yes!” And the Lord’s work is taking place *“in your days.”* It’s not just that God has been working in the past, although that is true, but that He is working now. Habakkuk’s accusation of divine idleness is wrong, dead wrong!

God’s answer is as true today as it was back then to Habakkuk. Whether we see it or not, God is working in powerful and marvelous ways today!

Friend, do you believe that? Do you believe that God is working today, maintaining, sustaining His creation and that He is providentially working in the world? Or, do you see the evil and the violence, and somehow think that God is asleep at the switch? What do you really believe? Because what you believe will directly affect your attitude and your action. If you believe that God is working then you'll be involved in advancing His Kingdom. You will be motivated by the Gospel. You'll live as a believer. You'll warn others of the judgment to come.

Before the Flood Noah preached for years and years and he never saw one convert. No one believed him, they laughed at him...thought that he was a fool. They'd never seen rain and Noah said that rain is coming and was going to flood the whole earth. It was only when God sent the rain that they realized that God's Word was true.

Though they're probably not even aware of the term, many Christians act as if they are *Deists*. Deism teaches that God is completely inactive. It's been dubbed the spinning top approach to history, teaching that God created the universe and set history spinning like a top, and then sat back to see where it would go, God never breaks into history to do anything. That's deism, the belief that God is inactive...but He's not. Deism is a worldview of hopelessness and listening to how hopeless some believers sound, you'd think that they were practicing Deists. ***God desires for all of His people to get the message*** and...

***b. God's plan is right on schedule.*** Like Habakkuk, sometimes we're tempted to get impatient with God. We have a terrible misconception – a false view of circumstances. We erroneously believe that what we see is all there is. Like Habakkuk, I often find myself incensed over the injustices of our society. I believe any sensitive believer does. We murder babies, and let murderers live; our communities are ravaged by violence, and yet we blame our communities; we teach children that they are animals, and then stand back appalled when they act like animals. How often we are tempted to cry out like Habakkuk, "How long, O Lord? Do something! Do something now!" We can be so impatient with God.

Please understand the biblical truth: our little slice of history is a fraction of a larger plan. Our lives are like the thread of a tapestry that God is weaving that encompasses all of history. Our ancestors impacted our lives; we in turn impact those who follow us. We cannot begin to judge the plan of God based on what we see in this brief moment of time. God is not finished. All that He is doing is on schedule.

This truth is powerfully illustrated in Galatians 4:4, which speaks of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the plan of God the Father, "*But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son.*" Consider what God did through the centuries, to prepare the world for the coming of His Son. God raised and deposed nations. He moved cultures. He manipulated individuals, from Caesar at the palace in Rome to a little impoverished couple in Nazareth—all of that was done to put them in the right place at the right time, so that Paul could write, "*But when the fullness of the time came,*

*God sent forth His Son.*” God is still in control, and in the “*fullness of time,*” everything is going to be okay. Christian friend, take heart in knowing that, no matter how black the hour, God is at work and what He is doing is right on schedule. So ***God desires for all of His people to get the message, God’s plan is right on schedule*** and...

***c. God gives us Revelation, not explanations.*** We Americans like to understand everything. We like to figure out why people do what they do. Perhaps that’s part of the reason psychology is so popular. Some have this nearly morbid fascination to dissect emotions to see how some people tick.

God gives a *Revelation* here of His work but He did not give an *explanation* of all that He was doing. This is an important principle. God’s work is amazing. God’s work is unbelievable but God’s work is often not explainable. God tells us as much as we can take and as much as we can understand.

Remember that Jesus said to His disciples, “*I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now*” (John 16:12). Each of us is at a different level in our spiritual life and God knows where we are at. He knows what we can take. Parents know that you can’t tell your children some things because they’re just not ready to receive them.

As believers, we do not live by explanations, we live by promises. God explains to Habakkuk just as much as he could take and He explains to us as much as we can take. So why doesn’t God give us detailed explanations of His work? ***Let me suggest two reasons.***

\* ***We could not understand it all to begin with.*** God’s thoughts are beyond our thoughts. It’s not important that I understand all about God. In fact, I could not worship a God that I completely understood. God has to be above me and beyond me. Life has to have its mysteries. Your life cannot be like some machine, every wheel and cog which you can explain. Life must have its mystery if it’s going to have its adventure. If we’re going to live by faith, then, we cannot rest only on explanations.

\* ***We would not believe it anyway.*** That’s exactly what God tells us, “*For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told*” (vs. 5). In fact, our tendency, whenever God explains something to us, is to argue with Him.

That’s what Peter did. When Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified, Peter argued with Him (Matt. 16:22-23). Jesus ultimately had to rebuke him. It’s not good when Jesus says to you, “*Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*”

That’s the problem, isn’t it? If God did explain things to us—why you’re laid off, why your marriage is so difficult, why a loved one has cancer, why your car breaks down when your kid needs new shoes? – Would it make you a better person? Would you really love

the Lord more and trust Him more, having had this explanation? I don't think so. Explanations do not encourage faith, promises do.

Take some time to study the heroes and heroines of the faith. Look at Abraham and you'll quickly notice that God explained very little to him. God didn't give him long and detailed explanations, blueprints or guidebooks. He gave Abraham promises. In fact, Abraham commenced his life of faith clinging to that great promise that he would have a son, and through him all of the nations of the earth would be blessed.

**2. God's choice of instruments of judgment shock us, vss. 6-11.** One of the popular movies from the 1980s was *Red Dawn*. The film depicted the invasion of the United States from the north and south by communist forces from Cuba and Russia in the beginning of World War III.

We're aware of the problems and sinful condition of our country but all of us think that the persecution, the brutality, repression, the atheism in places like China is so much worse. When the Communists came to power they slaughtered millions during the Chinese Revolution and when they came to power, they murdered thousands more after mock trials. Subsequently, Communist China invaded Tibet and murdered a million Tibetans. Communist China aided the North Koreans in their invasion of South Korea. When North Korea was on the verge of defeat, China invaded Korea and attacked American and U.N. troops, murdering many wounded and surrendered Americans. Over two million people died during that war.

North Korea would have collapsed long ago without Communist China's assistance. Perhaps a million North Koreans have died from starvation over the last 15 years while North Korea continues to build a nuclear weapons program with the assistance of Communist China. During the "Great Leap Forward" 30-40 million, perhaps more, Chinese were starved to death. Just ten years later during the "Cultural Revolution" all religious people were persecuted by the Red Guards. Religious buildings were closed down, looted and destroyed. There were numerous incidents of torture and killing. During one two month period there were 1,772 people murdered in Beijing alone. Communist China aided the Pol Pot regime that was responsible for killing approximately 2 million Cambodians. Most of us remember the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. Tanks rumbled down the street, firing indiscriminately. Throughout the night of June 3 the troops beat, bayoneted, and shot protesters. Tanks drove straight into crowds, crushing people and bicycles under their treads. Communist China is a place of brutality and oppression.

But if this morning, I were to tell you that because of her sins, God is going to use Communist China to punish us – most of us would be shocked and would protest – "Who are they to judge us?"

That's how Habakkuk feels. While Judah has its problems and is not lily white, Babylon is nearly Satanic and straight from the dark side. Why would God use the most evil of people to judge His straying people?

Habakkuk is not surprised that God is going to discipline His people, what shocked him was the dispenser of that discipline, the rod of correction that Yahweh chose. God dropped a bombshell: *"I am raising up the Babylonians."* The sinners of Judah were soiled saints compared to the barbaric Babylonians. Habakkuk had seen violence in Judah and now God is going to use even more violence to judge them for their violence.

A modern parallel to the marching hordes of the Babylonian Army would have been the Blitzkrieg of the Nazis during World War II. Blitzkrieg is German for "lightning war." It describes a lightning like force made up of tanks, infantry, artillery and air power, concentrating overwhelming force and rapid speed to break through the opposing forces lines. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Western journalists adopted the term *Blitzkrieg* to describe this form of armored warfare. The description of the Babylonian invaders in verses 6-11 would have been an ancient form of *Blitzkrieg*. God's sovereign use of the Babylonians reminds us of **Two Truths**:

**a. God's purpose is bigger than any of us and our problems.** We become so self-focused that we forget that God is painting on the canvas of world history, directing the nations according to His kingdom purposes and glory. God tells Habakkuk, *"I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own"* (vs. 6).

No doubt the Babylonians would have had a different analysis of their military exploits! They'd have attributed their might to their strong warriors or disciplined troops or their superior weaponry. Some in Israel may have argued that it was Satan, not God, who was behind this fearsome enemy. But God clearly says that He raised them up to bring His judgment on His sinning people! He is the Lord of history, who raises up kings and peoples and takes them down again according to His sovereign purpose.

It's easy though to lose sight of this when you face personal trials! For Habakkuk personally, it meant that life as he had always known it would come to a frightening, permanent change. The Babylonians destroyed the nation of Judah, leveled the city of Jerusalem, including the Temple and slaughtered countless Jewish people. They forcefully deported many more as slaves and left a weak remnant in the land as caretakers. Never again in Habakkuk's lifetime would he or his family know life as they'd known it, yet he and the rest of the godly remnant needed to submit their individual lives to God's greater purpose in kingdom history. Likewise, we need to view our lives within the greater picture of God's purpose in history.

**b. God's plan includes everyone.** Some believers have a false view of ungodly and wicked people and nations. Somehow we imagine that they are outside the plan of God. The ancient Jews believed that the only reason God created Gentiles was to fuel the fires of hell.

Often we view unbelievers from that standpoint; that they serve no earthly purpose. God, though, reveals to Habakkuk that the ungodly were an integral part of His

purposes in history. All people are included in the plan of God. God controlled Israel; He also controlled her enemies—in this case, the Babylonians.

A review of history shows that it was nearly miraculous the way the Babylonians came to power. A generation before Habakkuk, the Babylonians were little more than small, scattered bands of individuals living in the Delta region of the Euphrates River. They began to unite and organize, and almost overnight they challenged the two strongest nations on earth for world supremacy. They took the city of Babylon from the Assyrians in 611 BC. Then, they crushed Assyria and took her capital city, Nineveh, in 609 BC. They utterly decimated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. But just two generations later—a mere 70 years later—Babylon was no longer in existence. God raised her up; God fulfilled His purposes; and then God even chastised and crushed the very instrument that He used in His judgment of Judah. My friends, God has a plan; His plan is on schedule; it's not determined by mankind; and His plan includes everyone.

**3. God's hatred of self-sufficiency surprises us.** Ken Blanchard says that EGO stands for *"edging God out."* God is ultimately going to judge the Babylonians too. That last phrase in verse 11 tells us why, *"Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—guilty men, whose own strength is their god."* *"Guilty men, whose own strength is their god."*

Pride and self-sufficiency probably send more people to Hell than any other sin. It's the sin of Satan. It's catalogued as the number one sin that God hates in Proverbs 6:17.

The pride and self-sufficiency of the Babylonians contained the seeds for their own destruction. One of our major flaws in America is that we depend upon our own strength, our own power and ability.

When the space shuttle Challenger in January of 1986 lifted into the sky and blew up 73 seconds into its flight, the world was shocked. Many of us have seen the videotape of that terrible moment. We can recreate the picture in our minds of a deep blue sky marked with twisted trails of smoke and large chunks of metal plummeting toward the ocean. And we know, as we recall the grim specter of the explosion, that among the falling pieces were the bodies of some of America's finest men and women.

Most of us also know that the investigations into the cause of the tragedy pointed out some serious shortfalls in human judgment and materials management. *The New York Times* put it frankly: the ultimate cause of the space shuttle disaster was pride. A group of top managers failed to listen carefully to the warnings of those down the line who were concerned about the operational reliability of certain parts of the booster rocket under conditions of abnormal stress. The people in charge were confident that they knew best and that they should not change the launch schedules. They were wrong!

Ultimately, pride would destroy the Babylonians. Pride destroys all of us. As Charles Feinberg said, *"For one to make his own strength his god is to commit suicide of the soul."* God is repulsed by pride whether it is found in the hearts of saints or sinners.

**Conclusion:** In Acts 13:41 Paul used the words from our text to warn the Jews of his day of the judgment that would come upon them if they too persisted in refusing to believe what was announced to them with divine authority – that Jesus Christ was God's Messiah and salvation from sin could only be found in Him alone. Unfortunately, history repeated itself. The solemn warnings were ignored. Israel was judged again and Jerusalem was once more destroyed, this time by the Romans in 70 AD.

For nearly 250 years America has enjoyed unprecedented religious freedom. We have been a world power, but that all seems to be coming to an end. No one knows what the future holds but our leaders are preparing for more terrorism and nuclear bombs.

One outcome of the recent conference on Nuclear Security was that the White House warned state and local governments not to expect a significant federal response at the scene of a terrorist nuclear attack for 24 to 72 hours after the blast. When asked, Rick Nelson of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said, *"Do I think in my lifetime I'll see the detonation of a nuclear device? I do."* (USA Today, 4-13-2010).

At times like these we must remember that in a world that seems out of control. God is still in control, He's sovereign and He's still on the Throne. God can use even the most vile, despicable acts of an individual or nation for His purposes and glory.

Today the world is asking, "Why doesn't God do something about all the evil in the world, all of the sin?" My friend, God has already done something about it! 2000 years ago He gave His Son to die for all of our sins. He intruded into the affairs of this world and He's promised to intrude again in the affairs of this world. The world just goes on but God is moving. Just as He was working and overruling in Habakkuk's day, He's doing that today. He knows what He's doing and is not indifferent or inactive. He can use whatever instruments that He chooses to achieve His purposes. He wanted Habakkuk to trust Him even though He didn't understand. He wants us to do the same.

God is the Lord of the governments of this world and human history. He controls them and accomplishes His purposes. That was the lesson He was teaching Habakkuk and that's the lesson that He wants us to learn.

Are we learning it? Are we submissive to God's plan, even if it doesn't line up with our own? Are we ready if God should intervene in time and history today? Are we warning others to be prepared? That God will someday, as He did with Judah say, "Enough!" and hold this world accountable?

In 1969, in Pass Christian, Mississippi, a group of people were preparing to have a "hurricane party" in the face of a storm named *Camille*. Were they ignorant of the dangers? Could they have been overconfident? Did they let their egos and pride influence their decision? We'll never know.

What we do know is that the wind was howling outside the posh Richelieu Apartments when Police Chief Jerry Peralta pulled up sometime after dark. Facing the beach less than 250 feet from the surf, the apartments were directly in the line of danger. A man with a drink in his hand came out to the 2nd floor balcony and waved. Chief Peralta yelled up, "You all need to clear out of here as quickly as you can. The storm's getting worse." But as others joined the man on the balcony, they just laughed at Peralta's order to leave. "This is my land," one of them yelled back. "If you want me off, you'll have to arrest me."

Chief Peralta didn't arrest anyone, but he wasn't able to persuade them to leave either. He wrote down the names of the next of kin of the twenty or so people who gathered there to party through the storm. They laughed as he took their names.

They had been warned, but they had no intention of leaving. It was 10:15 p.m. when the front wall of the storm came ashore. Scientists clocked Camille's wind speed at more than 205 miles-per-hour, the strongest on record. Raindrops hit with the force of bullets and waves off the Gulf Coast crested between twenty-two and twenty-eight feet high.

News reports later showed that the worst damage came at that little settlement of motels, go-go bars, and gambling houses known as Pass Christian, Mississippi, where some twenty people were killed at a hurricane party in the Richelieu Apartments. Nothing was left of that three-story structure but the foundation. The only survivor was a five-year-old boy found clinging to a mattress the following day.

God has sent our world warnings of the coming storms of His judgment. Are we listening? It's one thing for us to speak of the sovereignty of God; it's another for us to believe it.

This morning I challenge you, in the face of international crisis, in the face of moral crisis, and in the face of personal crisis: Do you truly believe the lessons of Habakkuk? Have you put your trust in the God of the universe Who has a plan; Whose plan is on time; Whose plan is not determined and swayed by men; Whose plan involves everyone, including you?

That's the God that we must trust! That is the God that we must serve! Christian, are you serving Him? Are you living a life that pleases Him?

Maybe you're here today and you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. God's judgment is coming, why delay? Will you be ready when God unleashes His judgment on this sinful world?