

"I'm still alive but I'm barely breathing. Just praying to a God I don't believe in, 'cause I got time while she got freedom. 'Cause when a heart breaks no it don't break even." Those are the opening lines of a hit pop song, *Break Even*, by the Irish pop band, *The Script*. The obvious question is: Why would someone *'pray to a God they don't believe in'*?

I believe that I know. To take a line from *Ghostbusters*, **Who you gonna call?** That haunting line from a song about a broken heart is another reminder that when one faces the real problems of this life, the deep issues – where else can you go? Who else can you really go to besides God? And we all know this at some intuitive level. When you face a crisis, when a loved one has cancer, when we face a tragedy – over and over again – from both the pagan and the pious, you'll hear this request, "Please pray!" **Who you gonna call?** Jesus' disciples insightfully acknowledged this when they said to Jesus, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"* (John 6:68). And where else would you go?

To government, to the political world? We can't even win the war on terror. The last two terrorist incidents – the Detroit underwear bomber who tried to blow up a jet on Christmas day and the more recent Times Square bomber – failed because of incompetent terrorists, not because they were apprehended before they could attempt to set off their bombs. In 1964, then President Lyndon B. Johnson, in his State of the Union address, declared *War on Poverty*. The government might as well send up the white flag, because fifty years later very little inroads have been made in that "War." ***Is the solution then relational?*** If you can just find the right person, will your problems be solved? Is there some human being that you can call, run to? A divorce rate spiraling out of control loudly screams, "No." Even last Sunday with the sentimental warmth of Mother's Day, many returned home with a pit in their stomachs and a sense of dread because going home for them is not a good thing. ***Is the answer material?*** Bigger, better, brighter is not the solution. A new house, a new car, new furniture, a new cell phone – even if it's the I-phone – isn't the answer. We quickly discover the emptiness of things. They never satisfy. Acquiring them only causes us to long for more. Materialism is insatiable. ***Can we turn to science? The medical world?*** The American Cancer Society was founded in 1913 and is committed in its crusade against cancer. Do you know anyone who's died of cancer recently? Scientists can't even calm one little volcano. A minor volcano in Iceland coughs and it brings the modern world to a standstill. An essential part of the secular worldview is that by somehow understanding how nature works, we can gain mastery over it. I don't think so. **Who you gonna call? *Pleasure?*** Does Hedonism have the answer? More entertainment, better sex, 3-D movies & video games, a dream vacation? Pleasure may briefly anesthetize pain but it doesn't solve the core problems of life. We see pleasures abysmal failure in the buzz word of our age, B-O-R-E-D. I'm so bored! **Who you gonna call?**

Come up with any answer other than God and you find a 100% failure rate. That's why even a pagan acknowledges that they are *"praying to a God I don't believe in."* Who

else are you gonna call? That's Habakkuk's conclusion in our passage this morning, Habakkuk 2:1-4 (p. 663).

Habakkuk is troubled by ungodliness in Israel. He's more troubled by God's correction of his country. He prays, he cries out to God...he argues with God...because where else are you going to go when you face the weighty problems of this life? When your back is against the wall, when you've hit bottom and used up all of your options, when you have no more lifelines -- **Who you gonna call?** This morning we're going to discover that **Calling on God requires waiting, Calling on God means listening to God speak through His Word and Calling on God in faith results in eternal life.** If you're taking notes...

1. Calling on God requires waiting. *"I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what He will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint"* (2:1). When it comes to patience, most of us agree with Ambrose Bierce who defined patience as *"A minor form of despair, disguised as a virtue."* The things that really matter usually require waiting. Last Monday after nine months of waiting, *Ellie Mueller*, arrived. On Friday Jane went to pick up Aaron at college. I had some commitments that day but I was looking for them to come home all day. Some things require waiting and are well worth waiting for.

Habakkuk uses military analogy. A *"watch"* is a military activity that involves entrusting the trained individual with the responsibility of looking for potential threats to the community he is a part of. The faithful watchman denies himself normal hours of sleep so that he might be awake while others sleep. He does not go without sleep, but takes his sleep at another time, so that he might watch. He trains his eyes and does the right thing when he sees a threat. Staying at his post requires commitment!

Old Testament prophets are often alluded to as *"watchmen."* They are often found looking up to God. Habakkuk's question about *"why"* in chapter one revealed his need for an adjustment in his attitude. Habakkuk knew this, so the prophet took his stand – apart from man and the thoughts and cares of this world – on his lonely watch.

"I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts" The rampart is a tower or a bulwark. It's a protected, enclosed area, usually on the wall of a city. From there the watchman could look into the distance and detect enemy activity – or the approach of a messenger.

Waiting, particularly when facing a weighty problem, is vital for a healthy Christian life. And waiting is not just for Old Testament prophets. It's a continual theme of Scripture; the people of God are people who must know how to wait. Ps. 27:14, *"Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."* Ps. 33:20, *"We wait in hope for the LORD; He is our help and our shield."* Ps. 37:7, *"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him."* Isa. 40:31 *"Those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary."*

Habakkuk doesn't merely pray and then just go on with his life. He waits and gives God a chance to answer. Frequently, we do so much talking to God that we fail to take time to listen. Apparently, Habakkuk had a special place where he met with God. While we can talk to God anywhere and in any situation, it's helpful to have a place where we can get alone with God...somewhere where you can open your Bible, where you can bow before the Lord in prayer and let the Lord talk to you. That's because...

a) *Watching and waiting take time.* Habakkuk knows that God's second response probably will not come immediately. He's prepared to wait for it. He believes that an answer will come. Ours is an impatient, instant generation but it takes time to watch and wait. As we study the pages of Scripture, we find that mature believers were willing to wait.

God's response to us is rarely automatic. We've been imperceptibly conditioned by our push button world. Too easily we regard prayer as a way to get what we want, rather than the way in which we demonstrate and deepen our faith in God in the midst of waiting.

b) *Watching and waiting is usually lonely work.* Habakkuk said, "*I will stand...I will station myself...I will keep watch.*" Waiting is a first person singular task. Sentry duty is a solitary duty. Being a watchman was a lonely responsibility. A prophet's life frequently brought isolation and ostracism at the hands of a disobedient people. Habakkuk's vigil, as he set himself to watch and wait for God to answer his prayer, was almost certainly solitary and unaccompanied. His dialogue with God is represented at the outset as a personal, private expression of the dark night of his own soul.

Agonizing with God over the lost, over the State of the Church, our country, over a wayward child is to operate as a lone ranger.

c) *Watching and waiting offer an alternative option.* Habakkuk finds himself sinking, his soul overwhelmed, into a dark deep abyss of despair as he sees the wickedness around him, knowing God's judgment is imminent.

It's easy to drive a wedge between prayer and hard thinking, between waiting on God and wrestling with the perplexities of life. Job came to a place of new faith only when he stopped arguing with his friends and with God, and allowed God to answer him.

Habakkuk has wrestled with the issues. He's said all that he needs to say. He's emptied himself out before God and now he's ready to hand it all, including himself, over to the Lord. That's the alternative to more wrestling and arguing with God or anyone else.

d) *Watching and waiting call for quietness.* Sentries listen as much as they look. Especially during the dark night, it's vital to listen for even the slightest sound. To listen, it is necessary to have quietness internally as much as externally. If we're preoccupied

with our own problems and our souls are racing, it's very hard to hear properly. We can miss important sounds and imagine others.

Habakkuk said, *"I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me."* The prophet understands that he needs to both look and listen. He's not looking for an audible voice from heaven, but that still small voice of the Spirit of God within his own heart. God's Spirit brings His Word to our soul.

e) *Watching and waiting requires perseverance.* Resolve and determination are essential to the watchmen's work. It requires not only time but perseverance. To be a watchman demands immense self-discipline and determination to not be caught napping or daydreaming. It means faithfulness in adversity. A watchman endures all sorts of unpleasant weather and conditions. This quality of wholehearted perseverance in seeking the Lord is a steady refrain in Scripture. God rewards faithfulness.

f) *Watching and waiting implies being open for correction.* Some will only stop their insistent demands when they get the answer that they want, or when it appears that God has come around to their way of thinking. On the contrary, Habakkuk expects God to correct him, *"And how I may reply when I am reprov'd."* Habakkuk had pulled no punches in his response to God and he fully expects God to reprimand and correct him. But God doesn't just desire honesty, as we'll see in verse 4, God also desires humility. A personal relationship with God requires that we be teachable.

Too often, when God does reprove us, we frequently conclude that He must not be listening because His answer was not what we wanted to hear. The fact is that if we listen to God, our lives will have to change.

Every parent knows that children need correction for growth and maturity. So think about this: Why is it then, that we, as children of our Heavenly Father, so resist His correction so that we too might grow and mature?

Calling on God requires waiting. Pit-stops are essential for our spiritual growth and health. Formula One motor racing is the fastest sport in the world. Central to the strategy of winning a Formula One race is the pit-stop. No driver, no matter how fast, can win a race without taking a pit-stop. In the pit-stop the drivers take refreshment, receive instructions, have engine repairs, refuel the tank and set off on fresh tires. A Formula One race is all about speed and strategy, yet it's in the timing and management of the pit-stop that the race is often won. It's like the "time-out" in basketball where you take a break to listen to the coach giving very critical instructions for the need of that moment. Learning to wait on God can save us so much time, so many mistakes and heartaches. Like Habakkuk, we all need times of waiting, times of quiet prayer and devotion.

2. Calling on God means listening to God speak through His Word, *"Then the LORD answered me and said, 'Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the*

goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay” (vss. 2-3)."

God answers Habakkuk, "Habakkuk, here's your answer. Do you have a pen and paper?" God's message, at last, was coming to Habakkuk!

It's interesting that it says, "*write the vision.*" We quickly learn that this vital message wasn't a military message, or a social message, or a political message, it wasn't even a philosophical or educational message. It was a spiritual message, it was a message everyone needs to hear. The greatest need of our world isn't education, or politics or psychology or philosophy. Our world needs Jesus. It needs God. It needs a spiritual message and that's what Habakkuk got. The message of the Church is first a spiritual message.

a) God's Word is clear. When W.C. Fields was on his deathbed, a visitor found him reading the Bible. Asked what he was doing, he replied, "*Looking for loopholes, my friend. Looking for loopholes.*" But God doesn't mumble. He speaks with clarity and forthrightness. His message is not open for interpretation, nor is it subjective. The Scriptures are God's plain message to us. He means for His Word to be clearly understood, assimilated, applied, preserved and propagated.

It was the custom in Habakkuk's day to erect tablets, probably of wood, in public places so that notices could be attached to them. It was an ancient type of billboard. No room was given for confusion, error or inaccuracy.

b) God's Word is certain. Recently, I read about General Billy Mitchell. In 1924, this renowned U.S. military aviation expert predicted that there would be a naval strike on Pearl Harbor by Japan. His military superiors laughed him off. Because he continued to warn of this impending disaster, he was recalled to Washington and ultimately court-martialed. Twelve years later Billy Mitchell died of pneumonia, but precisely as he'd predicted, on December 7, 1941, Japan, without formally declaring war, destroyed the U.S. Navy fleet at Pearl Harbor by aerial bombardment.

Habakkuk 2:3, "*For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the **end** and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.*" Like the Church, like us, Habakkuk was living between the promise and its fulfillment. God's promises may be delayed but that does not change their fulfillment and certainty. They are always right on time, according to God's timetable.

This promise deals with the "*end.*" The word "*end*" here refers to the final outcome of the rule of Babylon. He's saying, "No matter what happens with Babylon, understand that I am in control, and I will bring this whole situation to my determined end." The prophet Daniel uses this same word "*end*" to describe the end of all history.

Life is filled with things we don't understand, but whether the perplexities are in Habakkuk's day or our own, God's Word is certain and reveals the outcome. God will accomplish all of His purposes and we know that believers are on the winning side.

God has made many promises to His people throughout His Word. Those promises were always fulfilled. To Noah God said, "I want you to spend 120 years preaching and building an ark. 120 years from now I'm going to make it rain." Noah and no one else had ever seen rain. He endured 120 years of ridicule, but at God's appointed time, rain fell. Sodom and Gomorra was inhabited by people who lived as if there would never be a time when they'd have to answer to God, but at God's determined moment, Sodom and Gomorra fell. God promised Abraham that he'd have a son. Decades passed to the point where Abraham and Sarah were well beyond the time of life that they were capable of bearing children, but at God's appointed time, Isaac was born.

On a hill just outside Jerusalem, a small band of disciples watched with their mouths wide open as the Lord Jesus ascended into the clouds. Two angels appeared, and said, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*" 2,000 years later He still has not come. For 2,000 years God's people have looked with great anticipation toward Heaven as we pray, "*Even so come quickly, Lord Jesus.*" We pray that because we know that His Word has never proven false. God's Word is certain! Jesus is coming...it could be today!

3. Calling on God in faith results immediately in eternal life. Verse 4 is the foundational verse of Habakkuk. Some have called it "*the great text*" of the Bible. To understand it is to understand the Gospel. To understand it is to understand the Christian life. It's so important that it's repeated by the New Testament writers three times; twice by Paul (Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11) and once by the writer of Hebrews. "*See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith*" (v. 4).

The latter part of this verse, "*the righteous will live by his faith*" is the key phrase in Habakkuk. It was also the catalyst for the Reformation, at least for Martin Luther. As a monk, Luther had become deeply aware of his sin and knew that he fell short of the standards set by God's law. The words of Habakkuk 2:4, "*the righteous will live by faith*" struck Luther as the solution to his guilt problem, but it was some time before he grasped that his sins were forgiven by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, apart from any efforts or works of his own.

On a journey to Rome, Luther visited what is known as the Lateran staircase, a set of twenty-eight white marble steps which, according to tradition once led to the palace of Pilate at Jerusalem and had thus been made sacred by the footsteps of Jesus. Throughout the history of the Catholic Church various indulgences have been offered to devout pilgrims who ascend the steps after communion and confession. Many pilgrims ascend the steps on their knees hoping to attain forgiveness of sins. That's what Luther was doing when he remembered Habakkuk 2:4. Luther himself said of this text, "*Before those words broke upon my mind I hated God and was angry with Him because not*

content with frightening us sinners by the law and by the miseries of life, He still further increased our torture by the gospel. But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood those words – “The just shall live by faith!” “The just shall live by faith!” – then I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God.”

Please notice in verse 4 that Habakkuk contrasts two kinds of people: the **proud** and the **righteous**. Pride sends more people to Hell than any other sin. Habakkuk’s point is that proud people, whose strength or ingenuity is their god (1:11, 16; 2:4, 19), will come to a terrible end, even though they may temporarily enjoy prosperity either as God's chosen ones in Judah, or as the Babylonian victors over Judah. All the proud, Jew and Gentile, will perish in God’s judgment. Yet, when it comes to salvation, none of us has anything to be proud of. As William Temple puts it, the only thing that I contribute to my salvation is my sin.

Habakkuk though stresses the positive side of his main point, namely, *“the just shall live by his faith.”* He simply says, “Righteous people have faith, and this faith saves them.” The heart of the gospel is that the righteousness which God requires comes by faith, and it’s possible for us as sinners to have it because Christ died for our sins.

Genesis 15:6 says, *“Abraham believed the Lord; and God credited it to him as righteousness.”* The relationship between trusting God and standing righteous before Him is that God looks at our faith and counts us righteous. The only reason God can do that for us as sinners is that Jesus Christ took the punishment for our sin upon Himself. When God credits a person righteous because Christ died for him and because he puts his trust in Christ, that’s what we call *justification* by faith. It’s the heart of the gospel. It’s the best news in the world to people who know they are sinners and that God is holy. Recently, there has been a lot of interest on television with the survival stories. People have become very fascinated with situations of survival. What an eternal blessing it would be if people would become as fascinated with the more important issue of spiritual survival.

But let’s not move beyond Habakkuk too quickly. The judgment of God is coming, most immediately in the Chaldean invasion of Judah, but finally at the end of the age. What is it that will bring life instead of death in the judgment? I urge you to ask yourself: *Am I ready to take my stand in God’s divine courtroom and hear the Judge pass an eternal sentence on me?*

There will only be two verdicts in that day. One or the other of them will be passed on every single person: either *“condemned”* or *“justified,”* hell or heaven, eternal death or eternal life. If you want to know how to be prepared for that day, listen again to Habakkuk 2:4, *“The just shall live by his faith.”* Habakkuk knew that everybody in Judah was a sinner and that the holiness of God prevents God from ignoring our sins: *“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong”* (1:13). Habakkuk taught that the only thing that could save us is faith. But faith in what? Not just faith but faith in God's mercy. In Habakkuk 3:2 he prays, *“In wrath remember mercy.”* Habakkuk knew that when he called them *“just,”* they weren't sinless. He meant that those who are right

with God in spite of their sin are those who trust God for His mercy. But how can a holy God, who hates sin, show eternal mercy on sinners who simply trust Him for mercy?

God didn't reveal that much to Habakkuk. Praise the Lord that He did to the Apostle Paul. The answer is the death of Christ. Paul said it like this: *"They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus"* (Rom. 3:24-26). Let me translate that into your situation. Friend, when you put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, when you give up trying to lead your own life and establish your own worth, when you stop seeking to please God with your puny efforts, and instead surrender your heart to Him and bank on Him for your future, **three things** happen: **a) Your sin receives its deserved condemnation. b) God's righteousness receives its deserved glorification. c) And you receive your undeserved justification.**

a) Your sin receives its deserved condemnation. You may be drunk with self-confidence now before the awesome holiness of God, but I promise you, on your deathbed (if God gives you that chance) you'll sober up in a hurry, and be scared to death that in a day or two you will stand with all your sin before God.

Sin must be punished. But God, who is rich in mercy, sent His Son to take our sin on Himself and suffered for it. If you commit your life to Christ in faith, the death He died becomes your death. All of your sins become His, and you bear them no more. They have received their deserved condemnation.

b) It's not as though God's righteousness was easily satisfied. It took the death of Christ for God's righteousness to be satisfied and to receive its deserved glorification. If His righteousness hadn't been at stake, He might have swept your sin under the rug. But He glorified His righteousness by requiring an infinitely valuable sacrifice—the death of His own Son. It's unthinkable in a moral universe that God could simply let bygones be bygones. The sins you committed ten years ago are as vivid and horrible and condemning as if you did them last night. The righteous God cannot forget and ignore sin—unless there is first an atonement, a sacrificial substitute. That's why God sent His own Son so that our sin might receive its deserved condemnation, and His righteousness might receive its deserved glorification.

3) Finally, when you trust in Christ you receive your undeserved justification. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 8:1). *"Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Rom. 5:1). *"However, to the man who does not work but trusts God Who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness"* (Rom. 4:5). Habakkuk taught us that when judgment comes the just shall live by his faith. When that Old Testament seed comes to full flower in the New Testament, we see that the reason the just live by faith is that the just are justified by faith. As Paul puts it, they *"are justified*

freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). God put forward His own Son, Jesus, as the atonement by His blood, to be received by faith.

The fact that we can do nothing to earn our salvation, and that we are not pretty good people who deserve heaven, is one of the most stubborn lies to dislodge from the proud human heart. It's to fall under the condemnation of Habakkuk 2:4, *“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright...”*

But the Christian life is not a 100-yard dash; it's a marathon. God's righteous ones, the ones He declares righteous by faith in Christ, are not just *saved* by faith, they must also *live* by faith.

We've made a tragic mistake in that we've frequently communicated that saving faith is a one time action. It's not. It's an ongoing, daily matter of trusting God's promise of salvation in Christ. Peter reminded suffering Christians of their inheritance, *“kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time”* (1 Peter 1:3-4). We're not to live by our feelings. We are to walk with Christ, just as we received Him, by grace through faith.

That rather eccentric philosopher and nature lover of New England of the 1800's, Henry David Thoreau, once said, *“If I seem to walk out of step with others, it is because I am listening to another drum beat.”* That's a description of faith: Christians walk as though listening to another drum beat...because we do.

Conclusion: What would you think of a doctor, who upon discovering that you had cancer, gave you a hug and said, “Take two aspirin and you'll be just fine”? How about a fireman who responded to a report of a house on fire by saying, “It will burn itself out soon”? Or, of a policeman who arrived at the scene of a robbery, shook his head and said, “Boys will be boys”? In each case, the response is inappropriate to the situation.

One of the most foolish and spiritually frightening phrases that you will often hear people say is: *“I'm not sure that I believe that,”* as if God's truth is somehow objective. While it is important what you believe – what is all the more important, what is critically important is: ***Is it true?***

Let me illustrate (pull out small new gas can with yellow tinted water in it, a glass and a lighter). The “subjective truth” for most people is that there is gas in this can, but it's not. It won't burn. The real truth is that (pour some into a glass and drink it) is that it's water. It doesn't matter that I believe or you believe that it's gas. The real truth is that it's just H₂O.

Many will say about the Bible, “Well, that's true for you.” No, my friend it's true. And to deny God's truth is to perish eternally.

God's Word promises, "*the righteous will live by his faith.*" Trust in anything else and it will cost you heaven. As Paul said to the Phillipian jailer in Acts 16:31, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*" The opposite of "saved" is "lost," and it is "lost" for all eternity!

Friend, are you saved today? Have you come to Christ in faith? Have you discovered that soul saving fact that Luther and countless others have, "*the righteous will live by his faith.*"