

“Let’s Take a Walk ... By Faith”

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2: 1-5

The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received. 2 How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? 3 Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. 4 Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

Chapter 2: 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 Then the Lord replied: “Write down the revelations and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. 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. 4 “See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith—5 indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the people.

John Egglon was a Deacon at his church in Colchester, England. He had never preached a sermon in his life. Never so much as gave a speech in school. Wasn’t that he didn’t want to, just never needed to. But then one morning he did. The snow left his little town covered in white. When he awoke on that January Sunday in 1850, he thought of staying home. Who would go to church in such weather he thought? Then he reconsidered, he was a deacon after all and if the deacons didn’t go, who would? So he put on his boots, hat, and coat and walked the six miles to the little Methodist Church. He wasn’t the only member who considered staying home. In fact, he was one of only 13 people that showed up. Twelve members and ONE visitor. Even the minister was snowed in. Someone suggested that they go home. Egglon would hear none of that. They’d come this far; they would have a service. Besides, they had a visitor. A 13-year-old boy.

But who would preach? Egglon was the only deacon. No Elders had shown up. So it fell to him. And so he did. His sermon lasted only 10 minutes. It drifted and wandered and made no point in an effort to make several. But at the end, an uncharacteristic courage settled upon the man. He lifted his eyes and looked straight at the boy and challenged: “Young man, look to Jesus. Look! Look! Look!! Did the challenge make a difference? Was all of Egglon’s nervousness and jumble of words worth it?

Let the boy, now a man, answer the question. “I did look, and then and there the cloud on my heart lifted, the darkness rolled away, and at that moment I saw the Son.” The boy’s name was Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He is known by most seminarians as England’s prince of preachers. Some people call him, the greatest preacher who ever

[Note 1]

lived. This story is simply a story of faithfulness! But this morning we are going to talk about walking ...by faith. Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted by Paul both in his letters to the Romans chapter 1 and verses 16-17 and his letter to the Galatians chapter 3 and verses 10-14. The author of Hebrews also quotes Habbakkuk 2:4 in chapter 10 and verses 35-39. Habbakkuk 2:4 in the NIV reads, "but the righteous will live by his faith." In the Contemporary English Version it reads, "Only those who live by faith are acceptable to me." The NRSV reads, "But the righteous live by their faith." So we see that the righteous people, those who are just, those who are acceptable to God, **live by faith!** Are you living by faith? [Note 2]

It is this verse which is the centerpiece or focal point of God's message to us today. As we come to the last two months of 2019 and look forward to the new year, 2020, let's covenant with one another, and covenant with God, to live by faith. I believe God is calling Doster Community Church to keep stepping forward in faith. As we ponder the future of our church we ask questions of ourselves like: Is the sacrifice worth it? Do I commit to being on one of the ministry teams? Do I join a Life Group? Do I ask my friend to be in a discipleship group? Do we give sacrificially of our finances or not? Do we trust God or not? There are no guarantees other than God's promises.

....(Pause) I believe God is calling us to step out and take a walk ... by faith. The father of the Reformed faith, John Calvin, in his commentary on Habakkuk writes this: "The righteousness of God is attained only through faith, so that the right way to live is to trust, specifically in God. Habakkuk calls all believers in all times to trust God, to be faithful to Him, and so to live life as God means it to be lived. [Note 3]

If we don't or choose not to, there are dire consequences. Without faith, without trust and commitment we cannot live life the way God meant it to be lived. The Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel is the creator. Yahweh is the creator of the world, you and me, and everything in it and beyond it. I think He just might have a good idea about what the best way to live life should be. So it is imperative that we listen to God when He speaks through Habakkuk calling us to live by faith.

Let's take a close look at the word "faith." What does it mean or what does it look like to "live by faith?" Faith is not an easy word or concept to define or get a solid handle on either. But I'll do my best to give you several angles this morning, hoping that one or two will break through and make it clear. Webster defines faith as "an unquestioning belief; a complete trust or confidence." So using that definition to walk or live by faith, is to live with an unquestioning belief in God and a complete trust and confidence in God that is lived out with a solid commitment. Far from relying on him/herself or their personal resources to obtain or maintain their style of life, those walking by faith, trust solely in the Living God, Yahweh. [NOTE 4]

Habakkuk uses contrast to give us a more clear picture. The prophet tells us what living by faith is NOT. One is not acceptable to God, righteous, or just if he/she is prideful, conceited, or "puffed up." The wicked rely on their own might, their plunder,

on themselves to provide pleasure. They are the ones who think they can do it themselves. NOTE 5

Listen to this description of faith by Christian author Mike Yaconelli: "Faith is not the way around pain, it is the way through pain. Faith doesn't get rid of the opposition, it invites it over for dinner. Faith doesn't give you the winning point at the last second, it ties the game and sends you into overtime. Faith doesn't give you the solution, it forces you to find it. Faith doesn't teach you at the moment, it teaches you in retrospect. Faith doesn't provide a net to fall into when your fingers are about to give way as you hang suspended over a cliff, faith gives your fingers the strength to hang on just a little while longer. In other words faith doesn't do anything when it is being exercised." It is that quiet confidence and trust that God was the one who inspired Paul to write to the Romans "all things work together for the good of those who love God." Faith is that peace that passes understanding when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, knowing and trusting that Jesus walks WITH us THROUGH the valley. When somebody of faith prays, they expect an answer. Now we have to realize that this does not have anything to do with time. Only God knows the perfect timing of things. So God may answer with a yes, a no, or a wait to our prayers. NOTE 6

There once was a man who accidentally fell over a cliff and as he fell he managed to grab a branch. His hands started to get tired and he yelled, "Help! Is there anybody up there?" God answered, "Yes I am here ... let go of the branch ... I will catch you." The man yelled, I am barely holding on to a branch and if I let go I will certainly fall to my death. God said, "I am God, trust me, let go of the branch ... I will catch you." There was a long pause ... and finally the man yelled, "Is there anyone else up there?" (laughing) His hands finally got too tired and he fell ... five feet only to land on a small ledge below him. So God really did catch the man. He just used a solid part of His creation to do it with.

Habakkuk is a great example to us in verse one of the second chapter. Habakkuk decides to wait for God to act no matter what. In the first chapter we find two prayers of complaint. "How long, O Lord? And Why?" To give you a little background King Josiah's remarkable revival which occurred when a priest rediscovered the Law buried in the rubble of the Temple and read it to the King happened a little over a decade earlier. The King rejoiced over it greatly and commanded all to read the Law and live by it. But this happened no more than 10-12 years before Habakkuk begins prophesying. The Law had been completely abandoned by Josiah's son, Jehoiachin. The Law was no longer consulted for moral or spiritual guidance. Judah had turned away from God and started to put their trust in idols only 10-12 years after a thorough revival that had brought much prosperity and peace. The first chapter tells us that righteousness is not an optional feature for a believer's life. God is the Holy One, He's the Mighty Rock. Isn't that enough purity, stability, and longevity to fulfill more than all we could ask or think in times of crisis. Let us wait for our Lord, for He will surely demonstrate that in the end, He alone is the Lord of history. History is God's! History is literally His-Story!

[NOTE 7]

Real living can only come from the hand of God, who gives daily to all who trust and believe in Him. Life apart from God proceeds to wither, shrivel, and dry up. There was a country song that was popular in the 90's written by Clay Walker titled "Live Until I Die," and the key lyrics are "I don't have to think about tomorrow, I don't need anything money can buy, I don't have to beg, steal or borrow, I just wanna live until I die." At first it sounds kind of simple-minded or even silly. "I just wanna live until I die." But hold on a second, I don't think that Clay Walker meant that he wanted to "exist" when he sings the words, "I just wanna live until I die." I think he means that he wants to act, think, sing, and grow in a way that means something while he is still alive. He wants to really live, to get every last drop out of every moment until he is no longer taking in air. The just person really lives and lives well; further the righteous person lives solely by an active trust, belief, confidence and commitment in and to the God who has revealed Himself to us in the words of the Bible.

The righteous/just in their day to day living ... produce fruit, spiritual fruit, like love, joy, and peace. Those who are acceptable to God are not haughty, drunken, prideful, look at what I have accomplished, I am indestructible, kind of people. Those who live by faith depend on God and God alone. That we may then live by faith, the prophet hints that we must willingly give up all those defenses which will disappoint us. We must realize that without God we are nothing and without any protections. We must rely on God and God alone and seek in God alone that which we desire. We must fix our eyes on heaven. But another thing to realize is that faith is not something that you can manufacture or do by pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and gritting your teeth and working harder than everybody else.* It is clear from Habakkuk and throughout the Bible that the righteous person is one whom God has declared righteous, he is not the one who has worked for such a status by ethical observances or obedience. It is God who acts as the judge that pronounces a person justified and free of all obligations to the law incurred by their sin and guilt. So we are righteous or just only by faith and this faith is not something that we can produce on our own but must trust and depend on God for. John Calvin puts it this way: "... righteousness is made known in the Gospel – and it comes to us by faith only; ... men cannot obtain righteousness by the law, or by the works of the law; it follows that it is revealed in the Gospel alone. If by faith the just live, then he is just ... by faith; if one is just by faith, then he/she is not so by the works of the law. Now listen to this, this is key ... "men are emptied of all works, when they produce their faith before God; for as long as man possesses anything of his own, he does not please God by faith alone, but also by his own worthiness." WE know from elsewhere in Scripture that none of our works are sufficient. All of our works put together are NOT enough to make us acceptable to God. That's why God sent Jesus. I'm quoting John Calvin again: "Now after God has stretched forth His hand to the elect [declaring them righteous by the blood of Jesus Christ] it is still necessary that they should confess their own want and need, as to justification; for though they have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, yet they are still deficient and have in themselves no

* [NOTE 8]

righteousness.” It is only given to us by faith through Jesus Christ. “Men cannot be justified by faith until they cast away every confidence in their own works, for if righteousness be of faith, then it is of grace alone, an unmerited gift, therefore it cannot be by works.” Faith strips us of all arrogance and leads us naked and needy to God that we may seek salvation from Him alone. Cast all your care on Him ... that anchor holds.

[NOTE 9]

As we take steps forward in faith, as individuals and as a church, may we take a walk, and may this walk be one in which we heed God’s requirement to make our relationship with Him our highest priority. We need to bring our deepest questions and turmoils before God in prayer, expecting answers and guidance. Great relationships take form when they are stretched to the breaking point and do not break. Think of Abraham climbing Mount Moriah with his only son as the only visible means of sacrifice; think of Elijah moping in the desert, Job scratching his boils, David hiding in a cave, Moses pleading for a new job description—all these heroes of faith experienced crisis moments when they were sorely tempted to judge God uncaring, powerless, far away, or even indifferent. Confused and in the dark they faced a turning point: whether to turn away embittered, or step forward in faith. In the end, all chose the path of trust and for this reason we remember them as ... giants of faith. Habakkuk trusted God and decided to wait on Him. He knew God had the answer to his questions. He knew and trusted that God would answer.

As we move forward, with this Mission and Vision written on the back of the bulletin, as we walk through the end of this year and into the new year, I pray that we will be filled with a trust, a confidence, a firm commitment and belief, that God loves us and wants to help if we will only let Him. If we will listen expectantly and with a willingness to act on what God says to us, we will be blessed! Those who trust will tell the truth, for they believe God will defend them. WE can say, I am guilty; I rely on Jesus Christ, He alone can pay the debt we owe. Let us walk forward with a trust that keeps on keeping on trusting and relying on God. It is God who seizes a person and enables them to know the will of God and do it. Live by faith. Live with a trust and commitment to do your best and then rest in the arms of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the rest. Let’s take a walk ... by faith! Let’s pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “Let’s Take a Walk ... by Faith” on Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-5

- I. You never know what God can do with a little bit of openness, willingness, and commitment. God can do awesome things with our efforts.
- II. The righteous, will live by faith. Those who are acceptable to God, live by Faith!
- III. John Calvin wrote: “The righteousness of God is attained only through faith, so that the right way to live is to trust, specifically in God. Habakkuk calls all believers in all times to trust God, to be faithful to Him, and so to live life as God means it to be lived.”
- IV. Webster defines faith as “an unquestioning belief; a complete trust or confidence.” Trust solely in the living God, Yahweh.
- V. Faith is NOT living in a way that is prideful, conceited, or puffed up.
- VI. Christian author Mike Yaconelli describes faith this way: “Faith is not the way around pain, it is the way through pain. Faith doesn’t get rid of the opposition, it invites it over for dinner. Faith doesn’t give you the winning point at the last second, it ties the game and sends you into overtime. Faith doesn’t give you the solution, it forces you to find it. Faith doesn’t teach you at the moment, it teaches you in retrospect. ...In other words faith doesn’t do anything when it is being exercised.”
- VII. I just want to act, sing, think, and grow in a way that means something while I exist on this earth. I want to depend on God so that my life has impact.
- VIII. We cannot be justified by faith until we cast away every confidence in our own works, for if righteousness be of faith, then it is of grace alone, therefore it cannot be by works.
- IX. Great relationships take form when they are stretched to the breaking point and do not break. Choose the path of trust. Cast your cares on Jesus, he is the anchor that holds. Step forward in trust, give your time, talents, and tithe trusting God to bless you.