

The Minor Profits

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[0 : 00] Well guys, you will recall that it was in accordance with your choice that we undertook a study that began, I don't know when it began, I guess a couple of months ago, a few months ago, with the minor prophets.

And the minor prophets just happens to be one of the most neglected portions of scripture in all of the Bible. It consists of 12 in number, nine of which are referred to as pre-exilic, that is, these prophets ministered before Israel or before Judah was carried away into Babylonian captivity. And the last three, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, are referred to as post-exilic prophets, that is, they were those who prophesied after the 70 year period of captivity in Babylon, when the children of Israel returned to Judah and under Nehemiah and built the wall and etc. and so on.

So, the minor prophets have suffered from a lot of neglect. But what a lot of people do not know about the minor prophets, and the one that we are continuing this morning in particular, his name happens to be Habakkuk.

Most of us can't even spell it. Sometimes it's hard to pronounce it, but it's Habakkuk. And I suspect that there probably isn't one out of ten, maybe even among Christians, who understand that it is a tiny verse tucked away in Habakkuk that God used as the impetus for bringing to pass what has been known as one of the most cataclysmic spiritual upheavals that ever took place in the history of Christianity. It is a little verse tucked away in Habakkuk that we'll be looking at this morning, if we get that far, that so moved Martin Luther to arrive at the position that he did regarding justification by faith, and as a result, and as a result, posted those 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg, and the Protestant Reformation was off and running.

[2 : 20] And before we get to that, I just want to remind you that the Protestant Reformation was initially undertaken, was started by, fueled by, fueled by, those who were full-fledged members of the Roman Catholic priesthood, including Martin Luther.

And what they wanted to reform was the Roman Catholic Church. They had no intention or desire of leaving it. They just wanted to see it cleaned up, because it was wreaking with corruption and everything else.

But, as the story goes, it was not much in favor of any kind of reformation, because once you have pronounced yourself as perfect and without sin, it's pretty hard to reform that. And that's precisely the position that they had taken.

So, let us get to our text, if we may. And it is found in Habakkuk, chapter 2. Well, let's just, I'm going to read some. What we're dealing with there is this.

Habakkuk is struggling with an incredible problem that has probably invaded the thinking and the minds of every one of us here, and just about every human being.

[3 : 43] And it ties in with, and has to do with the origin and the perpetuation and the dealing with evil in the presence of good and holy.

And Habakkuk, like all of us, was puzzled at some of the things God was willing to do that to us just wouldn't pass the test of righteousness or of logic.

But God did it. And He does it. And He continues. There is an old, old saying that God works in mysterious ways. And sometimes I think His ways are more mysterious than anything else.

But the burden of this, and what I trust it will come down to, at least it has in my own mind, is this. It doesn't matter how dire or how bleak or how painful or how difficult the circumstances are.

Whether you believe it or not, whether you know it or not, God really is still in charge, and He knows what He's doing. Even when you think, maybe He's forgotten all about you in your little corner of the world.

[4 : 59] But He hasn't. God is ever on the job, and this is a lesson that Habakkuk is learning, and he is crying out to God for some kind of reason or logic for what God is going to permit.

And I want you to look, if we may, and we're just going to read this. I'm going to reserve comment until we get down into chapter, closer to chapter 2 anyway. So let's just jump in with verse 1, I mean verse 6 of chapter 1.

And I'll reserve comment until we get further along, but I want to establish the setting once again. God is speaking to Habakkuk, and He says, Behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans.

Now that's almost synonymous with the name Babylonians. And He says, That fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs. Now He's talking about these forceful Babylonians who are going to be headed by a man by the name of Nebuchadnezzar. These people have a reputation for conquest and brutality, and just overriding all of their enemies and subjecting them to servitude and slavery.

[6 : 14] And they've developed a terrible reputation throughout the whole Mideast. And God says He is going to use those people to chasten and discipline His people.

And Habakkuk is at a complete loss to understand that. And Habakkuk's logic is, Are you kidding me? We're bad. The Israelites are bad.

But those people are worse than we are. And you're going to use them to chastise us? So let us look at this. I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs.

They are dreaded and feared. Their justice and authority originate with themselves. In other words, they recognize no higher order than themselves.

Their horses are swifter than leopards and keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping.

[7 : 20] Their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle, swooping down to devour. All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward.

They collect captives like sand. They mock at kings. And rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress or every defense.

And they heap up rubble to capture it. Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. In other words, he's saying, These are the enemy that I'm bringing against Judah.

And let you know you are no match for them. You will not be able to withstand these people. But they will be held guilty.

They whose strength is their God. In other words, force and the power of arms was the only thing that they worshipped. That was all that mattered to them.

[8 : 20] I'm reminded of someone who was interviewing Joseph Stalin way back when, shortly after World War II was over.

And the allies had won the war and everything. And they were talking to Joseph Stalin. And they were asking about the armies that were amassing and so on.

And someone objected. And someone said, But what about the opposition that you are receiving from his holiness, the Pope?

And at the time, I don't recall which Pope it was, but it was whoever it was at the time. And he says, He has said some uncomplimentary things about you and the armies that you are amassing.

Do you think that you will be able to withstand his rhetoric? And Stalin said, How many armies does the Pope have? In other words, he was putting his money where the force was and the physical power, not anything to do with the spiritual.

[9 : 27] And that's exactly what these people are talking about here. And here he is in verse 12 of chapter 1. He is contending with God and he is asking a question.

Habakkuk is puzzled by all of this. He's saying, God, how could you do this? How could you use the people who are worse than we are to judge us?

And he begins by asking a question. Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One? We will not die.

Thou, O Lord, hast appointed them to judge. And thou, O Rock, hast established them to correct. Thine eyes, in other words, God's eyes, are too pure to approve evil.

And thou canst not look on wickedness with favor. He's reminding God of his character as if God needed to be reminded. But Habakkuk is coming from the same point that we are, a purely human position, using human logic to try and understand the Almighty.

[10 : 35] And he says, Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and thou canst not look on wickedness with favor. Why dost thou look with favor on those who deal treacherously?

Why art thou silent when the wicked are swallowed up, those more righteous than they? Why hast thou made men like the fish of the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them?

The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, just like a fisherman. Drag them away with their net, gather them together in their fishing net.

Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net. In other words, the Babylonians, God is whatever it is that serves them, and in this case it's a fishing net.

They burn incense to their fishing net, because through these things, their catch is large, and their food is plentiful. Will they therefore empty their net, and continually slay nations without sparing?

[11 : 48] And then God is answering what Habakkuk is asking. I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart, and here he's entering into this situation with God, and Habakkuk is saying, I will keep watch to see what he, that is God, will speak to me.

He's saying, obviously these people are assigned certain positions on the guard post, on the walls, because they knew that the enemy would be coming. And Habakkuk is saying, I've positioned myself in my station of responsibility where I have been assigned, and I will keep watch to see what God is going to say to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved.

And then, the Lord answered me, and said, record the vision, and inscribe it on tablets. And fellas, what we are reading now is a translation of these ancient tablets, the original from which Habakkuk penned these words.

Inscribe it on tablets that the one who reads it may run. In other words, make it so plain and so legible that it cannot be misunderstood that when somebody is running and seeing it, they get the message, even though they aren't standing still and reading it.

For the vision is yet for the appointed time. It hastens toward the goal, and it will not fail, though it tarries. Sometimes this is the most difficult thing, is to wait.

[13 : 28] Wait for it, for it will certainly come, it will not delay. Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him, but the righteous will live by his faith.

This is the first time this phrase appears in the Bible. It is repeated again by the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans, and it is repeated again in the epistle to the Hebrews.

This is one of the more key verses to the Christian faith. And when it says, the just shall live by faith, it is referring to the essence of life for the one who has been justified is realized in his simple trust, confidence, reliance, dependence upon God, no matter what the circumstances.

And fellas, this can be a really bitter pill to swallow. Yes, but you don't know what I'm going through. You don't know what I'm having to deal with.

It's easy to talk about these things of having faith and so on, but how quickly are we willing to abandon that when difficulty arises and we really wonder whether God knows, whether God cares, whether God is able, why in the world doesn't he do something?

[15 : 12] Must I go through this? and you know what? This visits every one of us at one time or another.

We have occasion to wonder whether there is knowledge and ability in the Most High. Luther struggled with this for quite a while and I want to share with you a record of his personal experience. This is from the pen of Dr. James Montgomery Boyce. He is with the Lord now, but he has written some excellent things regarding the subject of the minor prophets and this in Habakkuk is something that everyone needs to know and should know whether they are Protestant or Roman Catholic or whatever they are.

It is a story that is worth repeating and it is just remarkable. I don't know how many of you saw the film when it came out years and years ago about Martin Luther and it has been made and remade a couple of different times.

One of the most stunning and kind of humorous things about it was recorded in the film that I saw. I think it was the original one on the life of Martin Luther was that as a young Augustinian monk who had received his orders in the Roman Catholic Church and was installed in good faith and all the rest of it.

[16 : 40] Martin Luther had such an incredible sensitivity to sin his own sin that he just couldn't seem to get any relief from it and it would keep him awake at night and every time he had one particular and this was true of most of them they would have what they called a father confessor

and it was a particular kind of like a mentor an older man of the priest and the father confessor was one to whom the young priest would go and confess his sin and the father confessor would of course forgive him of his sin and he would go on about his business this became the basis of course for the Roman Catholic confessional booth and so on well it got it got to the place where Luther was so at such unrest that every time he turned around he felt a need to go to the father confessor and it got so it got so the father confessor hated to see Luther coming because he knew he was going to have to go through this whole thing again and the poor man couldn't seem to get any relief at all from his sin and he was known to have cried out on different occasions my sin my sin my sin he just had an enormous sensitivity probably we could call it an irrational sensitivity to his sin now we all know that some people have an especially active conscience that won't let them get away with anything you know there are some people like that and then there are some that

Paul said they have a conscience that is seared with a hot iron nothing moves them and they never repent they never apologize they never anything you know they're just hardened so you've got those two extremes but Martin's was on the tender side and he just could not get any relief or satisfaction from his sin and it is incredible to note what took place here let me share it with you it says in Habakkuk 2 4 in Hebrews it occurs just before Hebrews 11 chapter 10 where the author writes in just a very little while he who is coming will come and will not delay but my righteous one will live by faith and if he shrinks back I will not be pleased with him but we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed but of those who believe and are saved this is Hebrews 10 clearly the faith Hebrews is talking about involves commitment this commitment carries on throughout life which is what the third word in Habakkuk 2 4 is all about the word does not say that the righteous shall begin by faith and then proceed on some other principle it does not say that the righteous shall draw on faith from time to time as faith is needed it says the righteous will live that is continuously by his faith that is the righteous will operate on this principle 24 hours a day 7 days a week 52 weeks a year so long as life lasts the book of Galatians stresses this principle

Paul had gone to Galatia during his early missionary travels and had taught the people of Galatia the whole counsels of God he had taught that the Lord Jesus Christ had died for them and had explained the meaning of his death he had taught the truth of the resurrection and had explained that they could have newness of life in Christ he had taught them about the Holy Spirit and Christ's expected return he had taught them about Christian ethics and the necessity of studying the Bible and as he unfolded this the church grew prospered and was soundly established however sometime after he had gone away he heard that those who had begun by faith were now ceasing to live by it they had begun to adopt Jewish ordinances and say to themselves faith may have been alright as a beginning when we were new Christians but now we must add works to faith we will have productive healthy obedient blessed

Christian lives only when we observe the feast perform circumcision and add other ceremonies and when he received this news Paul was aghast immediately he wrote back to warn them that they had adopted a different gospel and one that could truly enslave them Paul uses Habakkuk 2 4 to challenge living by the law he says all who rely on observing the law are under a curse for it is written cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law the only way to live is to live by faith this world may crumble about our ears all that we know and love may vanish but the righteous will live by his faith he will live by faith in the one who keeps us not only in the moment of our initial belief in Jesus Christ as Savior but in every moment of life as well and by the way fellas you can understand can you not how this ties in with the concept then the application of

Romans 8 28 put into practice God does work all things together for good for those who love him it doesn't make any difference what you're facing it doesn't make any difference what has been taken from you or who has been taken from you it doesn't make any difference what your health is it doesn't make any difference what your financial situation is God really is committed to after his own will after the counsel of his own will and this is this is something that is so easy to grasp in doctrine and so hard to live in reality it requires us to put into practice what we say we believe and I don't know how many times I've had the sometimes the unpleasant responsibility of counseling with people who are going through a really really tough time health wealth whatever it might be and what [23 : 26] I have often told them is the adversity that you are facing now is not to be minimized in any way but it provides you with an opportunity to see if you really believe what you say you do that can be a pretty sobering concept adversity is an opportunity for us to determine whether we really

believe what we say we do that's the just living by faith listen to this about Luther if you would as Luther studied the word he came upon this text the righteous will live by his faith it began to take root in his mind at this point Luther did not understand the verse as he later would come to understand it but he recognized its importance he recognized that somewhere in these words was a revelation of a different way of pleasing

God than by fastings self immolations prayers charity and good works there was a second period in his life when this text also spoke to him he began a pilgrimage to Rome remember he was living in Germany and he began a pilgrimage to Rome and on that journey he had crossed the Alps and had fallen sick at Bologna he he was deathly ill during this sickness he was tenderly cared for by the monks but Luther was overcome with the utmost darkness and dejection reflecting on how horrible it was to die thus under the burning sky and in a foreign land his physical condition reflected the inner turmoil of his soul and was an image of what he imagined it would be like to stand before the burning wrath of God and while he lay thus the words that had earlier pressed themselves upon his thinking returned to his mind and he found himself repeating in growing belief the righteous will live by his faith the righteous will live by his faith when

Luther recovered from his illness he went to Rome in that capital in the church of St. John's Lateran there is a staircase that is said to be from Pilate's judgment hall the existing stairs are in four parts the special inner two said to have been transported there miraculously from Jerusalem now we do not know whether they were or not but that's the Roman Catholic claim and the ordinary outer two the inner steps are not walked on here pilgrims mount painfully on their knees a step at a time saying prayers as they climb upward on their knees at different points on these stairs there are stains that have been covered with pieces of glass they are said to have been caused by the blood of

Christ spilled when he was taken in and out of Pilate's Hall as the pilgrims go up the stairs they stop at these places and kiss the glass praying constantly Luther came to the Lateran Church to perform this rite the Pope had promised an indulgence to all who would do it what happened to them there what happened to him there is told by his son Dr.

Paul Luther in a manuscript preserved in the library at Rudelstatt as he repeated his prayers on the ladder and staircase the words of the prophet Habakkuk came suddenly to his mind the just shall live by faith thereupon Luther ceased his prayers returned to Wittenberg and took this as the chief foundation of all his doctrine Luther's turnabout on those stairs marked the beginning of the reformation that was soon to sweep Europe 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

[28 : 26] God 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 well therein the human dilemma is addressed and it is what can I do to become acceptable with God and someone has said you're too late somebody has already done it and we are accepted in the beloved son and it isn't on the basis of our prayers or our giving or our climbing upstairs with bloody knees it is simply on the basis of nothing more than confidence reliance trust in the one who said he is worthy of being trusted and the question is can we or will we the faith the faith that is untested is a questionable faith and we are told by

James to count it all joy brethren when you undergo divers temptations or testings or trials knowing this that it is the trying it is the testing it is placing your faith into the crucible of fire that determines what it's made of and it is through this testing that we are tempered that we are strengthened and the tendency of course is to whine and moan and go through the pity party and why me and what did I do to deserve this these are all natural human reactions and what God wants us to do is just say father I have no idea why I'm going through this but as far as I'm concerned this is your present assignment for me and I just want to carry it out so thank you for being my all sufficient one for being my adequate one I just place my case in your hands you know guys

God doesn't do anything and God doesn't permit anything without taking everything into consideration I can't tell you what peace I derive from that just the knowledge that he knows he cares he's on the job and it doesn't matter what I'm going through that's part and parcel of that great plan and those who are justified on the basis of faith are not only justified by faith but we are called upon and challenged to live in that confidence in that trust on a day to day basis and that's nothing

more than another spelling out of Romans 8:28 it's all tied together have you questions or comments you'd like to relate anybody yeah very I think it's Andy Stanley I may have wrong but I think this is one of my wife's favorite stories or phrases and phrases what you're saying here that they're like lemons you find out what's inside when you're squeezed yeah absolutely absolutely and it's you know it's and Paul said I think it's Romans 5 that it is the trying or the testing of our faith that produces patience and the word the word for patience means it means the willingness and the ability to hang in there when everything militates against you and it is the and the Greek calls it the it means the ability to stay put under pressure and not yield or give in to despair and it means being subjected to whatever it is that is trying your faith and testing your faith and fellas it's the stuff that makes you it's the stuff that sets you apart it is the trying of our faith the testing of our faith works staying power that's what patience it means what it means the ability to remain under to hang in there someone has said when you reach you reach the end of your rope you just tie a knot and hang on that's what we're called upon to do and all the while our reliance our trust our confidence is in this incredible

God who knows us through and through and he is only kindly disposed toward us it's just the relationship is absolutely astounding and you know something fellas the world doesn't have a clue the world knows absolutely nothing about this and the tragedy of it is all too many Christians know almost nothing about it and their lives are lives of ongoing turmoil questioning doubting whining complaining and for them there is no peace there's no rest there's no trust it's just it's a wretched way it's a wretched way for a Christian to live someone has said that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross so the people who believed in him could live that way he died on the cross to give us what he said not just life but more abundant life and this is what it comes from it's a glorious thing to behold other comments or questions anyone well

[34 : 52] I trust you have a little better feeling for Martin Luther and I consider him one of my heroes but you know Luther had his problems Luther wasn't perfect none of us is and when Luther left the Roman Catholic Church and it's debatable whether he left it or whether he got kicked out it was kind of both probably but he brought a lot of baggage with him and you know what I don't fault him for that because I think if I had been in Luther's position I would not have fared as well as he did I'm sure of that so we all stand on the shoulders of great men who have gone in the past and Luther is just one of many there are so many others and they were all flawed just like we are because they had limited appreciation and understanding and yet they had a commitment to the word of

God and the truth of God and they would allow nothing to dissuade them and you think of men like like Wycliffe who was referred to as the morning star of the reformation Wycliffe came on the scene for 100 150 years before Luther and did some amazing translation work of getting the word of God into the vernacular the common people could read it and William Tyndale was another and William Tyndale was burned at the stake and by the way William Tyndale was also a Roman Catholic priest and he was burned at the stake as a heretic and the crime with which he was charged was smuggling Bibles into England in barrels of flour and at the time England was thoroughly Romanistic presided over by the Roman Catholic Church in so many ways and one of the famous quotes of William Tyndale who does just we have in our King James version of the Bible a number of contributions in it that originated with William Tyndale in his excellent translation work and when he was criticized one time by a hierarchical member in the Roman Catholic Church for the translation work that he did and how could he possibly excuse because you see the official position of the Roman Catholic Church back then and has had been for many many years is that lay people are not to read the Bible and the reason is because it would just confuse them and anything that you need to know you go to the priest and he will tell you and William Tyndale insisted that the people need the word of God in their own language so they can understand it and obey it for themselves and one of his most famous quotes to a

Catholic cleric who criticized him for translating it he said if I have my way about this it shall be that the common plowboy will know more about the word of God than does thou God wow and that's precisely what happened he up him the teacher and he will