

Living by God's timetable

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[0 : 0 0] Music Music Music Music Music Music Well very good morning brothers and sisters and it is great to be with you thank you so much for your invitation especially to Pastor Brian and the elders for inviting me to come along so glad to be with you again looking forward to the day that I'll be able to fly over and meet you again face to face today we're going to be looking at Habakkuk chapter 2 and waiting for God's justice let me lead us in prayer as we come to look at God's word together will you pray with me Our Heavenly Father we want to thank you that you are big enough to handle the big questions in life as we think today on issues of justice and suffering we pray that your spirit would help me to preach your word faithfully and clearly and we pray that your spirit may illuminate our hearts and minds and strengthen our faith in the Lord Jesus we pray this in Jesus name Amen

Waiting for justice Waiting for justice We were reminded last week that injustice is a sad but endemic feature of our world Injustice is where a person or group or nation is treated unfairly at the expense of others that are more powerful and influential We've seen injustice with the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines where only 2% of the low income countries have even received their first dose whereas developed countries are already rolling out booster shots We've seen injustice with climate change which is predominantly caused by the developed nations but it is the poor nations that suffer the greatest consequences We experience injustice on a personal level too where one race is prioritized over another where corruption goes unpunished where scammers cheat people out of their savings As Brian reminded us last week

Injustice makes our blood boil and it makes us feel very deflated and discouraged It makes us cry out to God How long?

When will you come in judgement? When will you set things straight? Sort out all of the evil But many times Pray as we do things don't seem to change In fact, if anything they seem to get worse Some of us may feel that way about politics or about the situation in our workplace We ask, why Lord?

Why do you allow this evil to flourish? Why don't you answer my prayers now? When will you finally put an end to injustice and bring perfect justice on this earth?

[2 : 5 9] Well that is the big question of the book of Habakkuk and we saw last week that the prophet Habakkuk was writing somewhere between 640 and 615 BC just before Judah was exiled by the Babylonians and Habakkuk was troubled because as he looked on the nation of Israel it seemed like God was doing nothing about their evil It seemed like his eyes were closed Habakkuk cried out How long?

And why? And in verses 5-11 of chapter 1 we saw God's rather surprising answer He would use the Chaldeans the Babylonian nation to judge God's people It was shocking because they were a cruel and wicked nation that was far more evil than Judah themselves were Now Babylon was proud arrogant violent merciless greedy and yet God said He would use them to judge His own people for their wickedness And God's shocking response led to a second complaint by Habakkuk in chapter 1 verse 12 to chapter 2 verse 1 Habakkuk cried out How can you use the evil Babylonians for your purposes?

God, you are so pure so pure so just so how can you tolerate the wickedness of the Babylonians and not just tolerate it but use it to achieve your own purposes against your people?

It's just unjust And in Habakkuk chapter 2 verse 1 Habakkuk waits in faith for God's response Look at verse 1 I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower and look out to see what he will say to me and what I will answer concerning my complaint And in today's passage we're given God's second answer In short in his perfect timing God will bring perfect justice His people will live His enemies will fall But not now only at the end Well let's begin point 1 the timing of perfect justice the timing of perfect justice and in answer to Habakkuk's question of how long when will you bring perfect justice God's answer is at the end Look at verse 2 And the Lord answered me Write the vision make it plain on tablets so he may run who reads it

For still the vision awaits its appointed time It hastens to the end It will not lie If it seems slow wait for it It will surely come It will not delay Now firstly notice that God in His grace answers Habakkuk's prayer He didn't have to do that but He did But He did And we have the same promises we bring our complaints and concerns to God as well That doesn't mean that God's going to answer us with an audible voice from heaven or a still small voice in our ears But in 1 John chapter 5 verse 14 and 15 we're told that God always hears our prayers and He always answers according to His will So whenever we're concerned about we can pray to Him with confidence and hope and know He will answer us Or secondly in His answer we're reminded that God is sovereignly in control of human history Now events may not be unfolding as Habakkuk would like or indeed as we would like in our own lives but they are exactly according to the sovereign plan of God

[6 : 43] We're told here God has a sovereign end that He is working all human history towards and nothing is random nothing is out of control and that ought to be a great comfort to us when we do face suffering or injustice It's all going to God's good end Well God is saying to Habakkuk that the judgement of Judah through the Babylonians will not be the end of the story There is more to the story that hasn't yet been told yet God's perfect justice will come But it wouldn't be now and it wouldn't be soon It would be at the end the visions to be written on tablets so that it can stand the test of time And so Habakkuk is forced to wait in faith to wait for God's purposes to arrive He must trust God that a delay doesn't mean that it's not going to happen

It will happen in God's time exactly as he has said And God assures Habakkuk that such humble, patient, waiting faith will lead to life in the end Remember Habakkuk had asked in chapter 1 verse 13 You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong Why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

And in verse 4 God gives his answer Look at verse 4 Behold, his soul is puffed up It's not upright within him But the righteous shall live by his faith Babylon, proud self-sufficient She revels in her power She feels invincible and untouchable The very opposite of humble faith But God assures Habakkuk Those who are righteous by faith They shall live Faith will triumph Not Babylon God's eyes are not blind to her arrogance and wickedness and he will not idly look on forever Verse 5 God says Moreover, wine is a traitor An arrogant man who is never at rest His greed is as wide as Sheol Like death He has never enough He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples

Babylon is intoxicated as if with wine Not really with wine It's that her victories have gone to her head She is intoxicated full of arrogance She just needs more and more She needs to keep feeding this insatiable desire for more and more to conquer the next nation to collect more spoils Babylon is addicted to victory and growing greater and greater and more glorious Like the grave not resting till it conquers every person So Babylon must conquer every nation But this verse tells us wine is a traitor This arrogant greedy addiction for more will in the end lead to Babylon's downfall And in verses 6 to 20 God pronounces His coming judgement upon them So the timing of perfect justice at the end the nature of perfect justice point to the nature of perfect justice and in verses 6 to 20 we're given a series of five taunts or woes against Babylon that's introduced in verse 6

Shall not all these take up their taunt against him with scoffing and riddles for him and say Now a taunt it means to ridicule someone to scorn the downfall of another person and you'll notice in the five taunts that follow each begins with the word woe That was a word that was typically used in funeral dirges Alas how could this have happened?

[11 : 07] However invincible Babylon looked God would bring her down Her funeral was coming Now in each woe we're told the crime and then we're told the punishment The nations celebrate that God will inflict on Babylon the very things she has inflicted on them That principle getting what you give it goes all the way back to the start of the Bible Genesis 9 verse 6 Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed for God made man in his own image It's what we call retributive justice getting what you give an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth to use the language of Futuronomy that's what true justice is about it's about getting what you deserve isn't it?

True justice is being judged according to your works in like manner not more not less Habakkuk has complained how can God overlook their evil?

and God replies in these verses he sees it all it's all accounted for and in the end it will get exactly what it deserves well the first woe is in verse 6 and the sin is the sin of stealing verse 6 word to him who heaps up what is not his own for how long?

and loads himself with pledges the picture here is perhaps of the loan shark cheating people and stealing money from them through fraud and extortion that's a bit like what Babylon did taking over countries that weren't theirs by military force and then requiring them to pay tributes to them even more more now verses 7 to 8 we see the punishment they who plundered others will themselves be plundered verse 7 will not your debtors suddenly arise and those awake who will make you tremble then you will be spoiled for them because you have plundered many nations all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you for the blood of man and violence to the earth to cities and all who dwell in them you see God says the punishment for Babylon will fit the crime those who have been violently plundered and oppressed by the Babylonians will arise against their oppressor and make sure

Babylon pays every last cent they will reap what they have sown they will get what they have given the plunderer will be plundered you see God will ensure that those who steal won't get away with it in the end but don't think that you can steal and cheat from your company from your clients from your parents from your family and no one will know nothing will happen God knows God sees there will be perfect justice in the end in verse 9 we have the second woe now the sin this time is exploiting others unjustly look at verse 9 woe to him who gets evil gain for his house to set his nest on high to be safe from the reach of harm now the Babylonians sought unjust gain as they conquered the nations and brought all the wealth back to Babylon historians tell us that around Babylon around Babylon they built a wall with 100 gates the wall was thick enough for a four horse chariot to ride around on it they thought all these ill gotten gangs that they brought back to Babylon would make them secure the city would stand forever but they were wrong in verses 10 to 11 we see the punishment that will come for their exploitation they will be shamed their security will be lost their house the city will be destroyed verse 10 you have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples you have forfeited your life for the stone will cry out from the wall and the beam from the woodwork respond see instead of security and safety the Babylonian kingdom will fall their house their house will be shamed their lives even the walls of the city will cry out regarding their injustice and their violence after all it was built with the wealth of battle and it's the same for us there is no security in sin

[16:08] God sees our sin God calls it to account often we we ourselves we search for security in money and careers and family and perhaps sometimes we're willing to cut corners to do some dodgy deals to get the money in more quickly but as the Pandora papers have recently exposed you can make money unjustly but your sin will be exposed in the end if not now God sees and it will bring your downfall to the end verse 12 verse 12 we see the third woe and the sin this time is violence verse 12 woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity Babylon was built by force they violently conquered the nations atrocities were committed to maintain public order it seemed effective effective it was folly because the Lord saw their violence and the Lord would bring perfect justice what they gave they would get their own cities that they built would be burnt with fire look at verse 13 behold is it not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labour merely for fire and nations weary themselves for nothing all their work would be nothing it would just become fuel for the fire of God's judgement the violence they perpetrated would come back upon them as the Lord of hosts the warrior God who commands the armies of heaven would bring upon Babylon exactly what they had inflicted on others in their arrogance they had used others for their glory but it would be futile they would be shamed in the end

God would ensure only he was glorified not them verse 14 for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea do you see in the end human arrogance will not succeed in the end in the end only God will triumph only God will be glorified only God will be known and served among all the nations not Babylon not any human civilization not any individual Isaiah himself had prophesied so Isaiah 2 verse 17 the haughtiness of man shall be humbled and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day now that that glorious promise that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea that day would begin as the Lord Jesus Christ came to earth 2,000 years ago remember remember John chapter 1 verse 14 that the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory glory is of the only son from the father full of grace and truth as Jesus Christ came down from heaven

God in human flesh he showed God in all of his glory and right now God's glory is being made known to the ends of the earth as we preach the gospel of the crucified Christ and that will continue day by day as we share the gospel with family and friends and neighbors and those around us until finally Jesus returns the judgment day arrives we're told Philippians 2 verse 11 on that day at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father and on that day the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea there will be no more Babylon no more proud people who exalt themselves against God and his people God and his son will be glorified alone on that day well the fourth world is in verses 15 to 17 the sin this time is debauchery verse 15 woe to him who makes his neighbors drink you pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness now this verse is not so much talking about literal drinking of alcohol what they've forced their neighbors to drink to get drunk on is their wrath which they have poured out in full measure as they've come in these military conquests they've poured out the wrath of their anger until they're staggering they're exposed until their cities are destroyed their armies are killed they're shamed by their destruction as they're left desolate and humiliated and naked and naked and God says in his perfect justice he's seen it and he will do the very same to them verse 16 you will have your fill of shame instead of glory drink yourself and show your uncircumcision the cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you and utter shame will come upon your glory the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them for the blood of man and violence to the earth to cities and all who dwell in them

God will fill Babylon with shame just as they did to others God will pour out the cup of his wrath for them to drink as they gave it to others God will reverse their nakedness and shame as they shamed others and they will be overwhelmed by exactly the kind of violence that they perpetrated to others whether man or beast or the earth itself well the final woe is in verses 18 to 20 and the sin is idolatry look at verse 18 what prophet is an idol when its maker has shaped it a metal image a teacher of lies for its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols woe to him who says to a wooden thing awake to a silent stone arise can this teach behold it's overlaid with gold and silver and there's no breath at all in it and Babylon had resorted to idols to empower their violence and exploitation and military conquest and God says what folly for a human being to create their own God it might look impressive covered with gold or silver but when all is said and done it's just wooden stone they're not alive they won't wake up they're powerless they're speechless they're lifeless contrast that to the true God verse 20 but the Lord is in his holy temple let all the earth keep silence before him the Lord Yahweh the God of Israel he is the one true God his temple in Jerusalem not just the God of Israel but the God of the ends of the earth all the earth will keep silence before him idols are silent because they're lifeless and they cannot speak but God is not silent

God speaks through his prophets God directs human history God pronounces his judgment God will bring perfect justice and God will do that not only for his own people but even on nations like the Babylonians and before God's majesty before God's judgment throne all must be silent they will be forced to acknowledge that he is the one true God and as they stand before him in silence justice will be done and be seen to be done not only among God's people but in every nation of the world God will bring his perfect justice as he treats us according to what we have done how could God use a more wicked nation to punish a less wicked nation how could God who is morally pure use an evil nation evil people for his purposes well in here in Habakkuk 2

[25 : 28] God gives his answer justice will be done in the end he sees all evil and he will bring retributive justice he will judge people according to what they have done he will bring their deeds upon their own head not now but at the end well just as God promised so it did happen for Babylon it took some time Babylon did indeed take Judah into exile according to this prophecy and 50 years later as God tells us here they themselves were defeated by the Persians the seemingly invincible city of Babylon was overthrown according to the word of the Lord and God's perfect justice was done but of course God's judgment on Babylon points us forward to an even greater judgment to come now the New Testament tells us that there is a final judgment day at the very end of time a day when all people will stand before

God's judgment throne to give account for their lives and God will bring his perfect justice judging us according to our deeds Romans 2 tells us how God will judge us on that day verse 6 he will render to each one according to his works to those who by patience in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality he will give eternal life but for those who are self-seeking and who do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness there will be wrath and fury there will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil the Jew first and also the Greek but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good the Jew first and also the Greek for God shows no partiality see what that's saying on judgment day God will bring perfect justice as he judges each one of us according to our deeds without partiality the righteous the good will receive eternal life the evil the disobedient will receive wrath and fury that's just that's right

God will bring his perfect justice except of course if we are to read on in the book of Romans we should realize that that leaves us with a huge problem because if God was to bring perfect justice judging each person according to their deeds well he must punish all evil and that includes not just the evil of people out there the evil of people like the Babylonians the evil that we see on the news he must judge the evil in our hearts in our lives our arrogance our greed our stealing our violence our exploitation our idolatry and Romans 3 would have us understand that we're actually not in the righteous category we're not in the good category we can't earn our way to heaven by our own good works by our own moral and religious effort as if I went to church enough and read my Bible enough and gave enough money to ministry and served enough times that that will get me my ticket into heaven no!

Romans 3 tells us we all rightly belong not in the good category the righteous category but in the evil category we deserve God's righteous wrath for our sins look at Romans 3 verse 10 as it is written none is righteous no not one no one understands no one seeks for God all have turned aside together they've become worthless no one does good not even one see how that echoes Romans chapter 2 we just read saying there's no one in the good category there's no one in the righteous category we've all turned aside we're all sinful and therefore on the judgment day when God judges according to our works we will all be silent before his judgment throne because we'll all be condemned Romans 3 19 says every mouth will be stopped the whole world held accountable to God there'll be nothing to say no defense no excuses no escape we will be as silent because God will be perfectly just he will destine us to eternal conscious torment away from his presence in the place Jesus called hell that's perfect justice at the end but of course praise God that's not the end of the story on that day there is still hope that we may stand there is still hope that we may be saved not through our own works but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ now come back with me now to Habakkuk chapter 2 verse 4 remember what God said behold his soul is puffed up it's not upright within him but the righteous shall live by his faith on judgment day the arrogant wicked will be destroyed but those who are righteous by faith well they will live and it was this glorious verse quoted in Romans chapter 1 verse 16 and 17 that God used to help Martin Luther to understand the gospel at a time when it had really been lost it was through this verse that that Martin Luther understood that we can never earn our way to heaven through our works because God will judge us with perfect justice and none of us can or ever will be good enough for God but he understood from this verse when we put our faith in Jesus

God declares us righteous in his sight on the cross Jesus takes our sin Jesus drinks the cup of God's wrath for us Jesus experiences God's righteous judgment on our arrogance and greed and violence and idolatry in our place and in return he gives us his perfect righteousness he gives us forgiveness it's the ultimate display of God's sovereignty over evil using it for good as the death of Jesus brings about the salvation of the world do you see for those who trust in Jesus death on the cross their sins are forgiven they're saved from God's wrath they're declared righteous in his sight no longer to fear his judgment but to look forward in hope for the return of Jesus to be welcomed into his glorious kingdom let me read Romans chapter 1 16 and 17

[33 : 19] Paul says I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith or from beginning to end by faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith see it's through the cross that God's perfect righteousness and justice is manifest and seen at the cross we see God's absolute commitment to punish all evil as it deserves even if it must be born by his own son in our place God doesn't just forgive us and say sin doesn't matter no sin must be punished justice must be done and at the cross it is done as Jesus bears our sin and yet of course at the same time the cross shows us God's absolute commitment to save his people who trust in him to fulfill his promises to pour out his grace his grace and so just as the cross displays in the ultimate way God's sovereignty over evil using evil for his good purposes at the same time it shows God's commitment to hold evil to account and so at the cross

God shows that even as he could use the suffering of Jesus to save the world he's also able to use sinful, flawed, proud, greedy, arrogant people like us too because as we come to the cross in faith God humbles our pride God transforms our heart as we come to the cross in faith acknowledging our sins acknowledging our sins acknowledging our unworthiness of God's love and favour recognizing our deserving of God's judgement as the cross humbles us we are transformed so that we no longer live for self we no longer live for our own glory we no longer use other people for our own benefit we no longer look for the things of this world for security we no longer pursue the things of this world in an endless quest for more to build ourselves up but having put our faith in Christ and his cross we live for God's glory we serve God's kingdom we strive to live righteous lives by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we wait for his return to bring the perfect justice for which we long and so the Christian life begins with faith in Jesus and his cross and it continues by faith in Jesus and his cross

God gave Habakkuk a vision of the end and he told him to wait in faith to trust in God's good purposes to wait for his perfect justice even if it wouldn't be right now and so this morning God calls on each one of us to wait in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ it's true just like Habakkuk we live in a world that is full of evil full of injustice we live in a world that hates Jesus that opposes his people that worships idols in his place as Christians so often we're marginalized we're mocked, we're rejected and if recent politics are anything to go by life for Christians in Malaysia seems destined to become harder still in the years ahead we long for justice we long for God to right the wrongs to punish evil it never seems to happen now as much as we pray otherwise but Habakkuk 2 reminds us

God has not fallen asleep he has not forgotten his people he will not tolerate evil forever he will bring perfect justice when Jesus returns evil will get what it deserves in fact end of the Bible Revelation 17 Babylon becomes the symbol for wicked humanity gathered together in arrogant rebellion against God and in Revelation 18 we see a vision of the downfall of Babylon the angels cry out fallen, fallen is Babylon the great verse 2 God has remembered her iniquities verse 5 repay her double for her deeds mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed verse 6 as she burns the nations weep as they cry out alas, alas, oh woe woe alas, alas, you great city you mighty city Babylon in a single hour your judgment has come and then in Revelation 19 the great multitude of heaven cries out in praise to almighty God hallelujah salvation and glory and power belong to our God for his judgments are true and just for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality and has avenged on her the blood of his servants once more they cried out hallelujah the smoke from her goes up forever and ever you see when Jesus returns

God's perfect justice arrives and we will celebrate hallelujah God is true and just God has saved his people God has judged evil God's perfect justice will arrive God has judged evil God's perfect justice will arrive at the end but now we must wait in faith we must trust in God's promises we must live for Jesus waiting for the perfect justice to come so as we close let me say to you do not despair when you see injustice and wickedness in this world do not doubt as if God will do nothing about suffering in our world and don't be tempted therefore to join our world in its arrogant greedy pursuit of glory and power for self for security in the things of this world have a cup 2 have a cup 2 reminds us it won't work you will get what you have given have a cup 2 verse 4 behold his soul is puffed up it is not upright within him but the righteous shall live by his faith let's pray together let's pray together heavenly father we want to praise you that you are sovereign over all of human history not only are you able to use evil for your good purposes but you will bring perfect justice in the end we praise you that you are not only the righteous God who brings perfect justice but you are the gracious and compassionate God who sent your son to die for us that all who put their faith in him would be saved so Lord help us to live by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to trust in his death alone to save us not our own good works to wait for him patiently to return to bring the perfect justice that we long for until he comes back help us Lord to keep living for you and your glory your kingdom we pray this in Jesus name

[42:10] Amen Amen