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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
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Title of sermon: Are You Just?
Series: Questions for God - #3

Habakkuk 2:6-20 NIV:

⁶ “Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, “Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on?” ⁷ Will not your creditors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their prey. ⁸ Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. ⁹ “Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin! ¹⁰ You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. ¹¹ The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it. ¹² “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice! ¹³ Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? ¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁵ “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies! ¹⁶ You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and let your nakedness be exposed! The cup from the LORD's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory. ¹⁷ The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. ¹⁸ “Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman? Or an image that teaches lies? For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. ¹⁹ Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’ Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’ Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.” ²⁰ The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.

If you would please, turn in your Bibles to the Book of Habakkuk, where we continue in this series called “Questions for God” -- questions that we ask every day. Proverbs 21:15 states this: “When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous and terror to evildoers.” I just wanna say, I like that verse. I like that verse. It is -- it's like, YAH! Lord, just let's end the day on that one. That's really good. Anything that brings delight to the righteous and terror to evildoers, I say, “Lord -- amen.” Justice does that. It does. It's in our bones. It's in every culture. There's not been a people group that has ever been discovered -- no matter how remote they are -- that does not have some form of ethic -- most importantly, the issue of justice. Not one. Why is that? Is that because that was a part of the selective process of evolution that it all of a sudden came by, that somehow, amazingly, no matter how disconnected these people groups are, they always have a value of justice? I beg to differ. I think they do because it's in our bones. It's in the heart of people. It's in the heart of God. And that's why Habakkuk comes to God. He's been dealt with. God said to Habakkuk -- what we talked about last week-- “Habakkuk, do not focus on the tool. I get to choose the tool as to how I correct you, discipline you, and do my work in you.” And Habakkuk, I want to resolve in this because the book is written and because this prophet spoke well the Word of God, I think came to grips with that and said, “Okay, Lord -- that's true. Now, can I have one more question?” He actually has two more. “Could I have another question?” “Yes.” “I'm okay with who you choose. I don't like the tool -- I really don't.” I mean, it's like, “You know, if you're gonna correct me, try and use people more righteous than me, but if you want to choose people like the Babylonians -- okay, I can live with that. But Father -- you ever gonna hold them accountable?”

I'm so delightful that this text is in there. Because God now comes to grips, just straight on, with this question. He's pushed Habakkuk back and He has told him, “Habakkuk, I get to choose the tool, and that's up to me, and you can live with it.” “All right, Lord, I'll surrender to that. But God -- is the Scripture right? When justice is done it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers? Is that right?” And God answers, “Yes.” Why? Because God is the one who has given us an appetite for justice. My friends, this is

general revelation, but if you wanna see people made in the image of God, can you tell me why we love justice so much? I know why -- it's because it reflects the heart of God. Can you tell me why so many of our stories and movies are about justice? I know why -- because the Scripture says, it brings delight to the righteous and terror to the evildoers. It allows us to know at the end of the day that which is wrong will be corrected and that which is right will be lifted up. Otherwise, why does it matter?

I'll tell you why it matters. Because if it didn't, we would be the most destructive people in the world. Let me illustrate this. When I was in Mozambique, the average lifespan was 40 years of age. Forty. Now here's what I noticed. It didn't matter how you lived. It didn't. You were gonna die by the time you were 40. What happens when you are convinced that no matter what you do, you're gonna die? You're not gonna outlive -- if you go to the hospital, you're probably a dead person, and if you walk the streets, you know that it's true because, let me tell you -- if you walked the streets in Mozambique back when I was there, you couldn't hardly find a person over the age of 35 to 40. What happens when you absolutely know, "No matter how I live, I'm gonna die at 40"? You have unrestrained drunkenness and partying. Why? Because it doesn't matter. Fact is, you eat well because your doctor says if you don't you're gonna die. You're gonna be a diabetic and you're gonna lose your feet, and -- you know the story. So, there's much of your behavior that gets crafted -- why -- by the hope of the future. You remove the hope of the future, we become the most destructive individuals in the world. If you extract and take out justice, and you eliminate it, then let me tell you what -- we are gonna be the most violent individuals in the world. Why do we love justice? It's because it's in our bones because of God.

You know the most famous verse of the Bible? Do you know what it is? Let's say it together. "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." Why did God send His son Jesus Christ? What's the Scripture tell you? Love. For God so LOVED the world. But let me ask you a different question that is the other side of the same coin. What demanded that God send His son Jesus Christ? What motivated Him? The love of God. What demanded Him? Justice. You see, if all we had was love, God could just declare -- "You know what? I love you all! You're in!" I mean, why not, right? That's what a good friend of mine believes. In fact, he just cannot understand that God would allow anyone to go to Hell, and he just thinks God is all-loving, and in fact, the title of the book from one individual who used to be a staunchly great, good, evangelical pastor, and he wrote a book called *Love Wins*. What's his conclusion? It's that God is so loving it wins over all things. What prevents you from going there? And it must -- justice.

You see, if God was simply loving, He would declare all of you -- "Yah, you're in! Who cares?" Right? "I love you." What motivated Christ to send His son -- His love. What demanded that He send His son -- justice. You see, God loves justice so much that He obligated His own son to die. Habakkuk screams out to God -- "God, do you care about justice?" "Oh, I'm pretty committed to it, my friend." "God, are you really interested in justice?" "Yes. So interested that I will hold myself accountable to it." It's true that God loves the world, and it's true that He sent His son. Why did He have to? Justice demanded it. And so, when Habakkuk comes to him, and he says, "Lord, I'm gonna stand at my watch--" Chapter 2 "-- and station myself in the ramparts, and I will look to see what you will say --" to what question? "--do you care about justice." And then He begins to unfold, and what He tells Habakkuk is what He tells you -- justice will roll down. God's justice will roll down straight from Heaven, and it will be awesome. You see, Habakkuk, that's what he said. "I'm gonna do something you wouldn't even believe. I'll give the best memory," God says. "I'm absolutely the best accountant. I remember every act. I remember every word. And by the way, I know every motive. Habakkuk, how much do I care about justice? Well, let me tell you. Number one" And He begins in this text. And we'll start in verse five -- "Indeed wine betrays him. Because he's greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied. He gathers to himself the nations and takes captive all the people. When all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn" -- oh -- "Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and make himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on? Will not your debtors suddenly arise and will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim. Because you have plundered many nations" -- he's speaking to the Babylonians now -- "the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and

cities and every one of them. Woe to you who builds his realm by unjust gain, to set his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin! You've plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out."

Chapter 2, verse 12 -- "Woe to him who builds a city on the back side of bloodshed, who establishes a town by crime and tells people whatever happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God and the waters cover the sea. You see, woe to him who gets his neighbor drunk just to take advantage of him. You will be filled with shame instead of glory. The violence you have done in Lebanon" -- verse 17 -- "it will now overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. Woe to him," verse 19, "who says to wood, 'Come to life!'"

What's God's answer? "I love justice. Justice is a delight to the righteous and a terror -- it's a terror to evil." And God wants us to make sure -- He's a great accountant. What is it that He will bring justice to, both back then and now? "Woe to those of you who live by intimidation. Woe to those who pile up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy" -- by what? Extortion. What is He saying? It's the individual that's a loan shark, it's the person who's gonna gouge somebody because they have moderate credit, and so they're gonna get 35% credit just to buy a car. "Woe to you who have the ability because of your influence and because of your power that you can extort and you can bully people, and you can force them because they have nowhere else to go." Oh, you can charge it, and yes, they will pay, and trust me, God remembers every deal you made. What is woe? It's an interjection of distress. What does that mean in common language? It's -- brace yourself, God's gonna hit hard. God's not gonna forget this. Woe to the person. Let it awaken you. Let it sober you. Let it bring some kind of sobriety to your mind -- God is not pleased. He's not. The debtors are being crushed, and God despises bullies.

I was in Romania in 1989. 1990 -- just after they had a firing squad that killed Elena and the leader of Romania, Ceaușescu. It's gruesome, isn't it? They'd line up these two people, a husband and wife, and shot them. Why? Because God says, "Woe to you. What you do will come back on you." They were bullies, they intimidated. László Tőkés was a pastor -- a Reformed Hungarian pastor -- and he was leading his church, and they came, and they were exiling, they were forcing him out. And they drove a bunch of other people out, and they would utilize the water and the heat interchangeably to force people to surrender. And they would tell people, "You will get no water and you will get no heat" -- when the temperatures drove down into the single digits. "Unless you pay your taxes, you get extorted." And the people had had enough. They were exhausted and they were tired, and they surrounded the church. I was standing right there -- not during the time, later -- standing right there around the church, and looked around the church where they surrounded the church, and they said to Ceaușescu -- "If you're going to kill Laslo, you have to kill all of us first." See, God says, "Bullies, you'll have your day." You will. But there will come a day that God will raise up the people and they will take you down. God's justice will roll down. And by the way, it doesn't wait just 'til the end. It doesn't wait until all the records of Heaven are kind of called due. It happens along the way. "Woe to you who are overindulgent, who because of your power, you have the ability to extort and to steal from people. Because you've plundered," verse 8, "many nations, the peoples are left with plunder. For you've shed man's blood. You've destroyed their lands, and you've lived high on the hog. Like an eagle," it says, the Babylonians had set themselves up and they were untouchable to their neighbors. At least they thought. It is true they would destroy people and they lived like kings. The best-known king -- go back and look at his lifestyle, Nebuchadnezzar. The one who ruled when Daniel was in exile, the one that Daniel spoke to. Oh -- look at his life, when one day he was out grazing like a cow. God says, "No, I won't let you get away with it." But for a season he did. And he lived -- oh, yes, as they say, like a king. And it was lavish.

When I was reading about the 6,500 migrant workers in Qatar I thought about this text. World Cup is coming to Qatar. It's a three million population little city. They're building a big, big stadium. And they said, as if they were talking about bent nails, "We've only lost 6,500 workers to death." Sixty-five hundred.

Building a stadium. And their response of these migrant workers? How does a town of three million people get two million migrant workers to come? Guarantee it's not legal. I guarantee you they're not living in good conditions. And I'll guarantee you they don't get to go home on the weekends to see their parents -- their mom and dad. Woe to you who build large stadiums where people will celebrate. And you built it on the backs of 6,500 people who died in largely illegal conditions. You see, that's what God is saying. You treat these migrant workers as if they have no names. God knows their names. You talk about them as if they don't count. God counts them. God knows the hairs on their head. He knows their blood type. He knows the number of cells in their body. And by the way, they were precious to God, because He made them in His image. Woe to the overindulgent who treat people like they're cattle. God says, "I will have none of it."

He says, thirdly, "Woe to iniquity." Iniquity is given to us in Chapter two, verse 12, "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed. Has not the Lord Almighty determined that people's labor is only fuel for the fire?" A line up earlier, He says, "You've established a town by crime." What does that look like? What does it look like to establish a town by crime? I've visited that city. This is São Paulo, Brazil. There's areas, they call them the *favelas*, when -- a number of our church, you've gone down there, you remember it. And when you went down there, the police don't go in there. They can't. They wouldn't come out alive. And so, when you go into these favelas, you go in -- this is really fun -- led by the mafia. Oh, that's good. That's encouraging, right? Yeah. Because the mafia invited the Christians in there because it's good for their kids to be taught music and art and all these things. It's just a bizarre thing to me, to go in a bus, and they said, "You have to go in this bus, because if you don't go in this bus, you're not gonna outta there alive!" What is it like? Well, there's some up side. My friend Wellington, when he used to live there, he got his motorcycle stolen, and he told one of the guys from the mafia that he got kind of beat up and his motorcycle was stolen. By 5:30 the next evening, his motorcycle was back at his house. You don't mess with the mafia. But it's not law -- it's brutality. And if you walk the streets in there, there's wires hanging all over the place that are exposed. I mean, half of the town of Salem would be electrocuted, because we wouldn't know what to do. Because -- you see, when you build a city by crime, your interest is not people. Notice what He says. "Has not the Lord determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire?" You see, people are so disregarded. They're expendable like in Qatar. Woe to the city. Woe to the nation. Woe to the business owner who sees people who work for you as nearly a means to the end. You're not interested in their personal life. You don't take an interest in their children. In fact, you don't even know their names. You simply demand that they show up, produce, and at the end of the day, the bottom line is met. Woe to you who build a life out of iniquity. Who build it off of crime. Cities build of it. Like Vegas. I don't think it's funny. I don't. Whatever happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. What better way can we celebrate infidelity? What better way can we mock chastity? What better way can we make fun of the vows that you made to your wife? I don't think it's funny at all. I pray that the city goes bankrupt. I pray that every neon light blows out and that the church down there penetrates the darkness, because it's a city built celebrating iniquity.

You see, God doesn't look at that and go -- "Oh, well. People are sinners. No big deal." Yeah, it is. Or He wouldn't say "Woe to you. Brace yourself, because God remembers." Woe for disgrace. What disgrace is he talking about? It's given to us in verse 15. "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin until they're drunk so that he can gaze on their naked bodies." What a sick person, if it wasn't for the fact that it's all over us. It's parties that are happening every day on college campuses where people get so blasted and so drunk that they can't remember. It's binge-drinking that happens and it's at a level that is so out of control that they're making it a national hazard. It's right here. I love the Bible -- it's terribly relevant, isn't it? Woe to you who navigate and negotiate and buy the kegs and purposely get people drunk so that you can strip their clothes off and gaze at their naked bodies and exploit them and somehow abuse them, and then put videos and trap them. Because now you have leverage over them. And now they can get them to do almost anything. Woe for those of you who use fashion as a way to destroy modesty. And to tell women, "Oh yes, be all that you can be, but make sure you exploit your body." And to men who've lost all shame, God says, "Yeah, I won't forget that. I'll bring the house down. I will." Woe because of disgrace.

And woe for idolatry. Verse 18 -- "Of what value is an idol since a man has carved it. Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts his own creation. Makes idols that cannot speak but somehow they become God. Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life,' or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up.' Can it give guidance?" I've known since I was a kid -- our pastor always preached against it. It's been pretty clear. Idolatry is evil. It replaces God for things that we've created. The problem is, I've traveled a whole lot of homes, and I don't see the idols that they talk about in the Old Testament. And so, as a kid, I used to think idolatry must be something that we got rid of. I mean, because I don't see any Asherah poles. Oh, you can go around and see some things. You go to Japan, you'll see a bunch of Buddhists. If you go to other countries. But in the US -- and you may think I'm just terribly naïve, but -- I really did, I kinda thought we got rid of idolatry in our country. I was like, it's not around -- not like these. I mean, people don't have these wooden statues that they bow to. Least in the city I grew up and in the country I was in. And then I realized -- idolatry is not just a wooden statue -- it's anything that becomes essential. It's that which is good that you turn into something that is now essential. The sneaky part of idolatry -- just like them, we take everyday life and objects and we empower them with the nature of that which is essential to my life. What kind of things? I know a lot of parents who their kids become their idols. They are so passionate about their kids becoming professionals at something that they will do anything, including bankruptcy themselves. Because their kid's identity is theirs. I know a number of people that work is their idolatry. It's really the career. Because -- and it can be men and women, but I think in particular men, if we are to be honest, it may be one of the areas that we really struggle, because if you have any two men that come together for the first time, it doesn't take them three minutes until they've asked the question -- what? "What do you do?" There's a lot behind that question. It's not because they're overly inquisitive. It's because they want to find out how they measure up to the person. They want to find out what socioeconomic, what sphere you're in. And then we go to things like hobbies, and that can become another idolatrous place -- sports. There's all kinds of things -- you see, career, money. But there's a new one today. There's a new one I haven't seen. It's the cause. It's something that I am so passionately committed to that it becomes more essential to me and more important to me than Christ. How do I know this? Because I've seen people over causes walk away from the Body of Christ in droves in the last ten months. I've seen people raise up causes -- not that these are unimportant. They're not. Racism is pretty significant, my friends. God hates it. But when it supersedes Christ among us, Christ in us, and we make it more essential than Christ -- can I just offer the option, it might have become an idol. It might be something that we have elevated and it is more important to me in judging you than that Christ is in you. Can be all kinds of things -- public health, political persuasion -- God's justice will roll down, because the very thing that you worship, the very thing that becomes essential to you is the very thing that God says will own you.

There's a thread that I hope you see in this text, and it's true of all of them. How you treat people will come back on you. You extort people, you will become extorted. You bully people, you will become bullied. You idolize certain things -- those idols will destroy you. Habakkuk says to us, "Hush -- God is in control." He is. Absolutely, God is in control. Does He care about justice? Oh yes. Is God just? Yes. He gives us what we're passionate for. That's the justice. Think about the ingenious of it. You wanna bully people? I'll let you get bullied. You want to extort people? I'll let you get extorted. You wanna get people drunk and take advantage of them? It will happen to you. Is God just? Yes. He gives them what they long for and it destroys them. You want another text that will take you right through it all in one chapter, you can just read the whole story -- Romans one. Starting in verse 18 going to the end. What does God say? "You turn away from me, you reject me, you deny my image, I will give you over to your" -- what? "Your passions." And what happens with those passions? They destroy you. Is God just? Yes. Absolutely. He gives you what you have a passion for. He does.

The Babylonians -- what happens to them? Stay with me on a timeline, it won't be very extensive. In 625, they defeat the Assyrians and they become a profoundly powerful and wicked nation. Nebuchadnezzar rises to the top, and they are seen as the most evil and bloodthirsty people in the world. It's almost as if they will never be defeated. You move along a few years. The year is now 536 -- only 89 years. Some of you in this room are over 89 years. In a span of your lifetime, they went from the most powerful nation in

the world to complete obliteration. Why? God loves justice. It is a delight to the righteous. It is a terror to evil. He does. He gives us what we're passionate for. He gives people what they long for. It's just that some desire life and some desire death. Don't fret injustice. It won't last long. They will eat themselves alive. They will destroy themselves. Why? Because that's the nature of God's justice. "I will give you what you long for." Some desire life, others death.

I saw it one day in a nursery. This group of five-year-olds -- probably not called the nursery, it's just a toddler room -- but I walked in. There was a little boy, he had a red ball he was holding onto, and five Nerf balls crunched under his chubby little legs. He was holding onto them, and the entire room was trying to get them, just like sharks. And this little boy would look at them and growl. I should've stepped in -- it was just too fun to watch. He held onto that little red ball and he held onto those little Nerfs, and they kinda tried to squeeze out under his chubby little legs, and people would kinda sneak over. And he'd turn around and he would snarl at 'em. He was doing everything he could, man. Why? Because he had it all. But I noticed something. It's true of all of life. And this is where it moves beyond the five-year-olds -- it moves to you. There was not one person in that room having fun. That little five-year-old kid was exhausted, tired, he had no friends, and he was not laughing. Why? Because when you're a bully, when you're an extortionist, even at the age of five -- when you're a thief, you don't have fun. You're too afraid of everything being taken from you. That's justice. Even in that moment, my friends, that's justice. Because God was telling that little five-year-old kid, "You want to have all the balls? Go ahead. It will steal your joy. It will take the fun out of life and it will remove every kid in that room from being your friends. You want justice? You got it."

Move that up to your life. Do you trust God? Do you trust Him enough to not be angry at Him for what you perceive as injustice? And do you trust Him enough to not let you become a Babylonian? Because God says to all of us, "Woe -- brace yourself." God will give you what you long for. Some people long for death, others life.

But Jesus -- I just gotta say, I love your Word. It's as true today as the day you penned it, Lord, through the prophet Habakkuk. And God, what happened to the Babylonians I think is the reason why you called the woman in Revelation 21 the 'great Babylonian' -- 17, that is -- you called her that because she's wicked, you call her that because she's ultimately defeated. You love justice. So Father, woe to us if somehow we're jealous of injustice. Or maybe even worse -- we've been tempted to participate in it. Let your grace sober us like you tried to do on that day with a little five-year-old boy. You do it again to us today. In Christ's name we pray and give thanks, Amen.

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