

Date of sermon: 2/14/2021
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Habakkuk 1:1-11
Title of sermon: Are You Indifferent?
Series: Questions for God - #1

Habakkuk 1:1-11 NIV:

1 The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received.

Habakkuk's Complaint

2 How long, 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 wrongdoing? 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.

The LORD's Answer

5 "Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. **6** I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. **7** They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. **8** Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle swooping to devour; **9** they all come intent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. **10** They mock kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; by building earthen ramps they capture them. **11** Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—guilty people, whose own strength is their god."

We are starting a new series. It's kinda funny – it's Questions for God. I have a few questions for God. Like, Lord, why did you allow my tractor tire to go flat? I needed it. I've got trees everywhere, downed fences – Lord, I need a tractor tire! Why now? And then this morning, when we were cleaning, the power – I have a generator, and it went out. And so – and it was about five, and it was really dark. And I was, like, "Lord, why?" So, I have questions for God. So I'm gonna have a moment with God for about the next 34 minutes, and you can listen in. And if I get kind of angry at Him, it's okay, He's had that before. I realize that when you ask questions of God, not everyone comes out of it really well. A lot of people, when they think that they have a hearing deserved with God, they come to Him. Job's probably the best example. He comes to God with all kinds of questions, and He says, "God, I want a hearing with you." And the Lord says, "Well, absolutely. I'm all in favor of questions. Job, before we have this little hearing and before you and I have this little dialogue, can I – I have a few questions for you, Job. Number one is – where were you when I was creating the heavens and the earth? And Job, did I ever seek your opinion on creation issues?" There were all kinds of questions. And I realize, even in Job's life, God is absolutely okay with questions, as long as you are okay with His answers.

Jesus had a lot of people come to Him and ask questions. They were asking questions all the time. And, I don't know if you've noticed, but just read sometime. Jesus often doesn't answer the questions. He answers another question. And it's really the same principle. Jesus is absolutely wide open to you asking questions. The real question I have is for you – are you ready for His answer? Because sometimes when we engage in this dialogue, we're not always poised and ready. One of my favorite movies is The Count of Monte Cristo. Edmond is unjustly arrested and taken to the Château d'If. And on the wall as he comes in is this phrase: "God will give me justice." When he walked into that prison, he believed that. It didn't take him long there and he didn't. And not only did he not believe that God would give him justice, but he thought God was unfair and worthy of accusation. See, God is absolutely okay with you asking questions. The question He has for you – are you willing to accept His answer?

Habakkuk had questions. He did. They were not easy questions. They were significant questions, like: God, are you indifferent? You seem unmoved by injustice. And it almost seems like, well, you're a party to it. Are you indifferent? Another question that he had for God: God, are you fair? I mean, do you have any sense of balance in you that you will treat one similarly to the other? Does that matter to you at all, or do you operate on a set of scales that you've never informed me of? Because I'd like to be informed of them. God – do you care about justice? Do you care about us? And maybe the most important question is, God, am I gonna make it? Am I gonna make it through this? Three chapters. When were they written? Oh, somewhere close to 600 BC. If you know your Israeli timeline, that's just on the front side of a 70-year period when the Nation of Israel went into exile. What's exile? It's prison. Seventy years of humanitarian prison. Seventy years under a foreign leadership. Seventy years having everything you own stripped – your bank account, your money, your sheep – everything ripped away from you. All of a sudden, being without power and without water and a flat on my tractor seems pretty good. Least I still have the rest of my tractor. They had nothing. And when he was writing to them, the Babylonians were rising in power and they were looking down the channel, and he knew exactly where this was going, and he had questions – "God, do you see what I see? Do you see what's happening to your people? Do you see what your people are doing? Lord, do you care? Does this matter to you at all?"

The nation was feeling the power of the Babylonians, and it's in that he comes to God with his four questions. And he braces himself, because God has answers. But they're not always what we want. Habakkuk's complaint, Chapter One – "The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received. How long, oh Lord, must I call for help, but you don't listen? Or cry out to you violence, but you do not save. Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you parade it in front of me like a movie? I turn on the TV, and no matter what I look at, it's injustice. I turn the channel – it's injustice. I get on my iPad and I look at the news and Yahoo, or whatever, and it's injustice. Everywhere, it's almost like you're orchestrating this. Why do you tolerate it? Destruction, violence. It seems like the law is paralyzed. Judges are silenced – at least the good ones. Seems

that justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous. In fact, they back them into a corner, and therefore it seems like all justice is perverted.” What’s Habakkuk’s concern? Well, it’s his people. As you read through the rest of the text, he’s heartbroken at the poverty of soul. He’s heartbroken at the problems. He’s heartbroken at the injustice. He’s heartbroken at everything that he sees. But it’s not just what he sees, it’s what’s happening. And it’s not only what happens out there, but it’s what’s happening to his people. When you read through the rest of the story, you begin to notice that Habakkuk is concerned – not just about the Babylonians, but he’s concerned about his own people, because when the pressure is put on them and their character is exposed, it’s not good. And he’s like, “Lord, take the heat off! You’re exposing the very fabric of our wickedness.” And he’s concerned. He’s actually heartbroken at the fact that everything that’s happening, it seems like Christians are not responding with faith, they’re not responding with concern and care for people. They’re getting as vitriolic and as angry and as fearful and as everybody else. See, that’s Habakkuk’s real heartbreak.

And if you’re a Christian today, you might say the same thing. Why is it that a pandemic and a racial tension has caused the church to explode with division? Why is it that families won’t speak with each other? In this last Christmas, so many told me it was the worst they’ve ever experienced in their lives. Why is it that friends used to be friends, but a mask has now become the enemy, and the wearing of it is somehow a lack of trust in – it’s a fearfulness of God. Why have we gone to those things? Why have we impuned each other’s motives? Why have we destroyed the Body of Christ? See, that’s Habakkuk’s concern with his people. It’s not just that the Babylonians are out there – and they are. It’s not just that there are evil people out there that are Christless. His real concern is, “God – you’ve seen what’s happening to your people. Do you care?” Do you care that all the pundits are saying the church will never be the same in the US? Do you care that the pundits are saying that 25 percent of all churches in the next 18 months will close? God, do you care that 35 percent of all senior pastors will resign in the next 18 months? Do you care? Do you care that police officers are retiring in droves? God, do you see what I see? You see, he’s heartbroken at the poverty of souls. He is. Because it’s not just about the Babylonians. It’s about his people. And if you’re a follower of Jesus, my guess is you’ve said the same thing. It’s not just about the difficulty of the pandemic and the difficulty of the riots and the difficulty of the political upheaval – it’s the tragedy that has landed in the middle of the church and is exploding it.

God, do you care? He’s not just heartbroken, he’s angry. He’s angry at the silence of God. There’s probably nothing worse than silence. It really is – it’s maybe the most cruel thing you can do. If you’re a husband, and you go silent on your wife – shame on you. That’s terrible. It’s horrific. When God goes silent...silent on us – it’s – it makes you just want to scream, and that’s where Habakkuk was. “I cry to you.” Why? Because God’s delays cause us to wonder if He cares. It’s just a natural reaction. Even for those of us with admitted impatience with God – when He delays, when He is long, we ask,

like David did, how long, oh Lord? How long do I have to look at the back of your head? If you want, you know, the Psalms of grief share, it's Psalm 12 and 13, and he's perplexed with that. But Peter even addresses it. He goes, "God is not slow, as some consider slowness." Well, why is he writing that? Because there's a whole lot of people who said, "God, you're slow! Why are you taking so much time? Judge the wicked, and let's get on with Heaven!" Oh no no, God's not slow. He's up to something. But the reality is, enduring prayer is often, if not always, the place of great susceptibility. You see, it's enduring prayer. Think about it. When you pray a prayer and God answers it – woo hoo! You're walking on water. You're like, "Hey, this is awesome! I prayed, and BOOM!" And people are like – I just was with some folks the other day, and it was a prayer that was prayed at 10:00 o'clock in the morning, and it was answered by 3:00. Oh, that's awesome! There's no temptation in that, there's just glory. There's praise! You know where the temptation is, it's in the delay. Enduring prayer. Luke 18 prayer. The kind of prayer that Abraham and Sarah prayed where it went 20 years of delayed answer. Twenty years. God's delay – when we're praying, when we're waiting, when we're wondering if He cares – that's the place where you might be as a follower of Christ most susceptible.

I have a theory. It may not be correct at all. You can throw it away. But the theory is this – the younger you are in the faith, God answers your prayers more quickly. I don't know if that's true – it just makes sense to me. And the reason is, because God's trying to encourage your faith. But as you get older, don't be surprised if God delays. Why? Because He still cares about your faith. See, you don't have a fragile faith. You don't have an embryonic faith – you don't have a thin-iced faith. You have a strong faith. And what's the one thing Hebrews chapter 11 tells us? That faith pleases God. It's the one thing that just delights the heart of God. And He's always wanting to grow your faith, He's always wanting to stretch your faith. Ah – that's the pits, but He does! And so, therefore, don't be surprised that the older you get and the more developed your faith is, that sometimes God is gonna delay some things. Not because He doesn't love you, but because He does love you. But notice, it's in that moment that there is a susceptibility to what? Your anger at God. God, why aren't you answering us? Why aren't you bringing justice to this situation? Why don't you correct this person's view? God, why don't you stop this gossip? God, why don't you expose the untruth? God, why don't you bring home my son? God, when are you going to answer my prayers about my husband? Those are the points where God's delay can cause us to ask the question – do you care? And it's oftentimes in those delays that God's lack of judgment seems like an endorsement. "How long, Lord," David said, "do I have to look at the back of your head? Do you care?" "My foot almost slipped," Asaph said, in Psalm 73. "My foot almost slipped." Why? "Because when I looked at the unrighteous, they were getting along wonderfully, and the righteous were taking it on the chin." Like Pastor Jeff said, it was just one blow after the next. When He delays, it's there that we begin to ask the question. "God, whose side are you on?"

A friend of mine, Darrie, he's a pastor in Colorado, and his wife was selected on a federal kind of committee on trafficking. And so, she would frequently get these reports from the federal government on the numbers of kids, young kids -- predominantly young ladies, but also boys -- that were being trafficked into the United States -- who was doing in and what was happening. And one day, Darrie was reading -- it wasn't something private, only for her eyes, but it was a document, and he began to read it, and he -- he and I had lunch or coffee after he read it, and he said, "Mark, I read through about page five, and I stopped." He said, "My eyes and my heart simply couldn't take what I was reading." And Habakkuk would ask, "God, why? Why don't you take every trafficker and just snuff them out right now? Why don't you just give them all one good heart attack. Or why don't you alter their cocaine? Whatever you want to do, Lord, I don't care. But why?" And when God doesn't answer that question, we begin to wonder -- whose side are you on? And then God says, "I'd like to answer. I'd like to give you some thoughts, Habakkuk. Look at the nations. Watch and be utterly amazed, for I'm going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told." What's His answer? "Habakkuk, I am moving. I am up to something. I am not indifferent, I see what's happening, and I have a plan, and I'm working my plan. Make no mistake, Habakkuk." "Make no mistake, church in America," God says to us, "I am working, I am moving, I see what you see, and I am up to something that is amazing." Look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed. Why? Because when God answers, you won't be disappointed. Why? Because you can never underestimate God. You can't. You can never underestimate God. God has demonstrated the ability to do much with little. God has demonstrated the ability to bring life out of death. God has demonstrated the ability to rescue a little baby that was left in water in the lake and use him as a mighty deliverer. God has demonstrated His ability to take an exiled king, running around for ten years, living in caves, and bring him to the point that he becomes the most famous, effective, and literally almost worshiped king in the Nation of Israel. "Habakkuk, prepare yourself. Why? Because I'm gonna do something amazing."

Bishop Willimon one time was at a campus. He was a chaplain at Yale, and he's the bishop of a state in his denomination, and one day a student asked Bishop Willimon, he said, "You know, the mainline churches are declining. Do you see any hope for them?" And it so happened that Bishop Willimon was from a mainline church. And he said, "Well, if you knew what I know about the American church today, you'd be pessimistic. It's a mess." And he paused, but then he said to the student, "But when you have a resurrection in your story, all things are possible." Habakkuk, when you have a resurrection in your story -- I understand, he doesn't, we do. When you have a resurrection in your story -- and God might say to Habakkuk, "When you have a parting of the red sea in your story, all things are possible. When you have a resurrection from the dead in our history, all things are possible." Let me ask you a question -- does that resonate for you? Does that start to rise up within you, and does that begin to displace some of the anger and maybe even some of the worry about the things you're praying for and the things that you're hoping for? When you have a resurrection in your history,

all things are possible. When God has the ability to bring life from death, maybe the things that I'm concerned about aren't all that huge. Habakkuk, never underestimate God, but be prepared for an answer you don't expect. Here's the hard part – you have questions for God? God says “Absolutely. Bring them on. I welcome them. Come into the chambers of my love. Listen to my grace. But will you be ready for my answer?”

“I'm gonna raise up the Babylonians. The ruthless and impetuous people who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They're feared and dreaded. Their horses are swifter than leopards. Their calvary gallops headlong. And they're all bent on violence. I'm gonna raise them up. I'm gonna do something – but not just that – I'm gonna do something beyond you.” What does He say? I want you to look at the nations. I'm gonna ask you a question, and I think you and I both know the answer. Where was Habakkuk's focus? Nation. Where was God's focus? The nations. One of the dangers of our anger at God is, it is very often myopic. “God, why aren't you doing this in my life? God, why aren't you touching my husband? God, why aren't you” – and you fill in the blank. And when God comes back to us, there's two things that He says. Number one, “I want to surprise you by the extent of what I'm going to do. I'm gonna do something far beyond you – I'm gonna do something in the nations. And not only the extent, but the vehicle. I'm gonna use the Babylonians.” You see, most of us, if we were honest, don't mind – oh, correction is not easy to take, but most of us if we have a mentor in our lives that we perceive is righteous and worthy, then that correction is – well, we can take it. Oh, correction might be hard to receive from our spouse, but the reality is, we can calm our heart down and realize – that person loves me. They have my best interest. And receiving correction from our spouse – well, that might be hard sometimes, but we can get ourselves there. But none of us like correction from a person that we perceive is immoral, violent, stealing things from other people, and with a character that makes muddy water look clean. None of us like that. None of us like being led by a person with ill motive or with poor character, and we look at that and say, “How can you ever support a person like that?” Might be a different question. Has God chosen to use a vehicle that we may not respect, love, or even want, but happens to be the vehicle that He's chosen to lead you?

Don't use my words as an excuse for your immoral character if you're leading somebody and you say, “Well, God's put me in a place of leadership, and He doesn't expect me to be, you know, morally pure.” Naaah – you twisted my words. But God may use somebody that is not kind, and He may work in an area far broader than yourself. Be prepared for an answer that you don't expect. What is it? God, you may be working much broader than I realize. And you may be working in ways that I don't like, but God says, “You will not be disappointed. I'm on the move! You will be amazed. You won't be saddened. You won't be disappointed. You're gonna like where we end.” The journey may not be your friend. God has all kinds of questions that He wants to answer for you. He loves your questions – He welcomes them. He says to you, “Come into my chambers. I love you. I'm happy to listen.” The question is, are

you ready for His answer? Are you ready to hear God say, "Quit whining"? Are you ready to hear God say, "I'm gonna use somebody that you don't trust, that you don't even like, to bring about my will – and I'm gonna work way bigger than just your prayers, I'm gonna work in the church. I'm gonna work in the city. I'm gonna work in the nations"? So therefore, learn to trust God's timing.

"I'm on the move. You won't be disappointed. I am going to do this in your days. I'm going to do something in your days that you would not believe even if I were to tell you." I love that! "Even if I were to up-front tell you, you still wouldn't believe it! But I am gonna do it in your days, but I will do it in my time." I've said it before and I'll say it 'til I die, God is seldom ahead of me. I'm terribly impatient with God. I want God to move faster. But His point is this – I will do it in your days." In other words, "I've heard your prayer, Habakkuk. I do care about justice – I'm not indifferent. I am on the move. But I will do it in my timing." Why? Because timing is everything. It is. Think about it. A *word aptly spoken*. What's a word aptly spoken? It's a word that fits the time. It's a word that fits the time. God stretched out His hand – or God stretched out the hand of Moses when Moses was there and he stretched out his hand and God moved. He didn't move the day before, and He didn't move when they were all dead in the sea. He stretched out His hand when – what? The army was right behind him. Timing is everything. And that's gonna be hard for us, but we have to surrender to that, and we have to realize that God uses timing to His perfection.

I had a good friend, Janet Brown, who's a missionary in Japan, and she had long been telling me, in another church – "Would you please bring a team? Would you please bring a team? I want a team – a short-term team." She's just a wonderful missionary, and for a variety of reasons, we never got around to it. And then one day we put together the team and we went there. And oh, how perfect it was. Because it was when the team was there that she got word that her brother had died. And her brother was so much more like her father, because her father was such a tragic failure. So when her brother died, it was like losing a good friend. It was her brother, but it was really almost like her father. And she's the one who told me, "How I thank God that you didn't send the team too early. Because I needed the team this week." See, God's perfect. Now, if you would have asked my friend Janet years ahead, "Are you impatiently waiting for a team to come from our church?" Oh, she would have said, "Yes! When are you gonna do it? When are you gonna do it?" And my friends, you have to be willing to not cave in to people's impatience. You have to be willing not to cave in even to their anger. If the fact that your delay is simply because of your incompetence, well – no, that's not a good excuse. But if God's timing is perfect, then sometimes, I would say often, God says, "I will do it in your day. I have heard your prayer. And – I'll do it in my time."

John Oliver – if you've listened to him, he's a comedian – and he was being interviewed by a woman – and he was asked by this woman, "Did you ever go to church when you were younger?" and John said, "Yeah, I did. 'Til I was 12 years of age. At the age of 12,

I decided, 'I'm gonna give this gig up.'" She says, "Why?" He goes, "Because I didn't like their answers. They were trite. They were shallow. I had a friend who lost an uncle, and the pastor said something like, 'Well, it's God's will.' Another person, their parents divorced, and somebody at the church said, 'Well, we'll pray about it.'" And he said, "I didn't want anything to do with that. And if it's God's will – and that's the kind of God that they worshiped – I don't want anything to do with that God either." So he says, "I walked away." His last lines were these: "I need something that's deeper, something that has more integrity to it. Something where they have honestly wrestled with the process." I'd say, "John, I agree with you. We need something deeper than just trite responses." By the way, praying for somebody's not trite. But I would agree, sometimes the church tends to dismiss things. Casually, and maybe even flippantly. "John, I couldn't agree with you more. We need something deeper. You have every right to ask deep and significant questions to God. God, why do you not stop all divorce? God, why don't you eliminate every doctor that takes the life of an infant in the womb? God, why do you take some uncles that are so beautiful and so wonderful and helpful for their families, and other uncles that are molesting their nieces, you leave them alive and you don't expose them? John, you're absolutely right."

The church needs to wrestle at a deeper level with God. But that's really not the question we should ask. The question is this – are you willing to hear God's answer? If it might cause you pain, are you willing to hear God say, "I'm not just about you, I'm about the nations"? "I'm not just about you getting through this virus. I'm about refining your heart." "I'm not just about keeping you safe – I'm about exposing the anchor of your heart that is coming out in this season." Questions for God -- He says, bring them on. Are we as a church – am I – ready for His answer?

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