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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Habakkuk 1:12 – 2:5
Title of sermon: Are You Fair?
Series: Questions for God - #2

Habakkuk 1:12 – 2:5 NIV:

Habakkuk's Second Complaint

1 ¹² LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you will never die. You, LORD, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish. ¹³ Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? ¹⁴ You have made people like the fish in the sea, like the sea creatures that have no ruler. ¹⁵ The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad. ¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food. ¹⁷ Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy? **2** ¹ I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

The LORD's Answer

² Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. ³ For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. ⁴ "See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness—⁵ indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.

There's a book that was written a number of years ago – it's called *God, Are You There?* And it wrestles with some of the issues of questions. We ask that, not when things are going well. We ask it when there's a miscarriage. We don't ask it when there's a healthy baby. No one asks, "God, are you there?" when the news is good. You don't ask that question. You ask it when you're hurting. You ask it when things aren't good. You ask it when you have questions. That's Habakkuk's place – he's asking the question, "God, are you there?" And – this is not a question that weak people or carnal Christians ask. This is a question I think a lot of us ask. Because within every one of us is this passion of God's fair treatment of us. "God, I'm serving you, and you don't seem to be coming through for me. Are you there?" It starts early. I mean, you can see it at one-year-old kids and two-year-old kids – if somebody comes in the room and they take their toys, and they're like, "Nooo. These are my property. I didn't pay for them, but they're mine." We can see it when kids get a little older and grandma is cutting out the cake, and they're looking at the cake – not to see if they want to eat it, but which one's the biggest. Because we want to make sure that – what? -- we're treated fairly. We see it in presents. We see it in the vaccine distribution. There's all kinds of issues about the vaccine distribution. Who's it gonna go to first, and is that fair, and are they justified, and – oh man, it's not just about the distribution of it, but there's all kinds of people who are angry because they feel they should be higher on the list. Is it fair?

After all, I – and you fill in the blank. And then there's fairness of senators going to Mexico, and then there's – I mean, we could go on forever. Why are we so frustrated? Because within every one of us is this deep, deep passion about fairness.

I have a question for you. Think with me. Does God care about fairness? Does He? I know for humans we are absolutely passionate about fairness. We are. Where have I seen it? Same place you have. Unions were birthed because of fairness. The Olympic Committee spends millions of dollars every year trying to validate what? Fairness. They ripped bicyclists, Floyd Landis and a score of others, because they – what? Were found to be enabled – helped – by drugs. It's not fair! And so they stripped them of their medals. Some of them multiple gold medals. Why? Because it's not fair if you cheat. We've seen it in our call today of equity and equal pay. I'm absolutely for that. Two people doing the same job should absolutely get the same pay. I mean, there's all kinds of context to that, maybe duration of time and a score of things. But fundamentally, absolutely, we would all sign on for YES! We believe in equity. It's so strong in us I have watched siblings never speak to each other when they determined something wasn't fair. I have witnessed families separated because dad decided he wasn't gonna be "fair" in the distribution of his estate. I'm seen lawyers called. I've seen families destroyed. Because mom and dad didn't have a lot of money? No! They had a ton of money, but they distributed it in a way that "wasn't fair." We have a passion for fairness. We do. Fairness is about us. Justice is about you.

We have a passion for fairness. Habakkuk did. "Oh Lord" – chapter one, verse 12 – "are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, will not die. Oh, Lord, you have appointed them to execute judgment; oh Rock, you have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil...." Can you just hear Habakkuk laying the groundwork for – "And so, therefore" – you can just hear him kinda setting God up. At least, in his own mind. "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil. You cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?" Who's he talking about? If you're new with us, what was happening is, again, this is about 600 years prior to Christ – 625 – and God's writing him a letter, and He's looking down the channel at the day that His nation that He loves, the Nation of Israel, would be taken into exile – that's human prison – taken there by the Babylonians, who are ruthless, wretched, Godless people. And Habakkuk's issue with God is – "I know we're sinful, but they are way more sinful. Why are you not" – what? – "holding them accountable? Why not, God?"

"You have made men. Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" I like the way he puts it – "Well, we're not perfect, but we're better than they are!" Oh, yeah. "You've made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler." And finally, he ends and he's just literally laying the groundwork, and he makes this statement – chapter two, verse one – again, remember this is a narrative that flows. They added the chapters later, so sometimes the breaks aren't great. Here's one. "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; and I will look to see what God will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this

complaint.” Why does he say that? Because we have a passion for fairness. We’re born with it. We somehow think that life will cheat us and we’re gonna make sure no one, including God, ever rips us out of what we’re due. We have a passion for fairness. Oh, it goes down as far as little kids that look at presents. It goes to adults. It even goes to people who count the number of people that respond to their birthday and say to another, “I got more friend wishes than you did.” “Well, that’s not fair because” – and we fill in the blank. Why? Fairness is all about our esteem, it’s about our value, and it’s how we perceive everyone is treating us.

But I ask you a question. And I want to wrestle with it. Is God concerned about fairness? I want to suggest to you no. I don’t think God cares about fairness. Seriously? God? Where would it come from? Well, let’s think about it for a moment. Is God concerned with fairness? Well, I want to suggest – no. What’s my basis? If God was concerned about fairness, where would you and I be headed? Go ahead and answer it – I know you’re not supposed to curse in church, but – you’d be going straight to Hell. You would be. You say, “No, no no no – I’m too good.” Uh, sorry, you don’t know yourself. The reality is, the Scripture says all of us have what? Sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And the Scripture goes on in Romans chapter six, three chapters later, and says, “For the wages of sin is death.” If God was fair, you and I would be headed to Hell. And if you don’t buy that, you’re gonna forever struggle with God. If you don’t buy that, you really will. Because if you don’t buy that, what you’re really saying is, I’m saved not because of the grace of God, I’m saved because He liked what He saw. I’m saved because when God looked at me, He said, “You know what? You’re a mighty fine catch. I’m gonna save you.” Or God looked at you and said, “Boy, you’re handsome. I think I’m gonna save you. I could use a good-lookin’ man like you on my team.” Oh, no, of course we wouldn’t feel that way. We wouldn’t say that. But here’s the issue – if I don’t fundamentally believe that I don’t deserve Heaven, then I will forever fight God.

Is God fair? The reality is, if God was fair, I wouldn’t be going to Heaven – I’d be going to Hell. If God was fair, and His interest is fairness, then the Bible would need to be rewritten in at least certain parts of it. Matthew 20 would be one example. There’s a story of the vineyard owner. And he goes out in the morning, and he’s hiring certain individuals to come into his vineyard that they might work for him. And he goes out at eight o’clock, and he hires a certain group of people. Then he goes out at ten o’clock and he hires some more. And he offers them the exact same payment as what he was gonna pay the guys that came in at eight. Well – I mean, two hours later and you’re gonna pay them the same? Well, it got worse, because 12 o’clock there were some other guys that came to work, and they went to work for him, and he said – “Hey, tell you what – I’m gonna pay you exactly the same that I paid the guys at eight o’clock in the morning. Are you good with that?” “Well, yes, that’s awesome! I work four hours later and I get paid what they get paid? That’s incredible!” Well, there started to be some mutiny amongst the folks, because after all, if you go to work at eight o’clock you should get paid more than those who go to work at 12. Well, it all fell apart at four

o'clock. Guy hired some more people. Four o'clock – an hour before the whistle blows, and the vineyard owner brings these folks in, and – lo and behold, that unfair guy offers what? The same as what the folks that started at eight o'clock. Let me tell you what – that's the day unions got started. Yes! Fair? Are you kidding me! You get paid the same to go to work at four o'clock than those who --

See, if God was fair, there are portions of the Bible that would have to be rewritten. Oh, it's not just Matthew 20. But the Nation of Israel – they wouldn't have been chosen. They wouldn't have been blessed. You know how I know? It's because they were never faithful for more than a couple of weeks. They got blessed and they mishandled it. They went into exile and they learned their lesson, they got out, and they went into slavery, and they got led out, and God did the miraculous, just like we were singing where there's a beautiful imagery where you make oceans, you know, highways, and – you know, through oceans. I was, like, yeah, that's what God did. What was He doing? He was delivering His people. Were they thankful for it? For about a day. Fair? Was it fair that God chose the Nation of Israel? Was it fair that God chose Jacob over Esau? No! There's not a thing in the Bible that tells you God is interested in fairness. And if you are, you're gonna have a real problem with God. If you're gonna hold God accountable for fairness, you're forever gonna be angry at Him. If you're forever going to look at the Body of Christ and compare your life to somebody else in the Body of Christ and think, "But I –" God is going to say to you very kindly, "I don't care about fairness."

I love Habakkuk. He's a good man. I love his kindness, his boldness. I love his defense of the nation. And -- I'm probably just like him. "Okay, God – you've heard my complaint. I'm gonna stand here and wait for your response." And do you notice that God doesn't say to Habakkuk, "Oh, let me tell you why I chose a reprobate nation to discipline you"? He doesn't say that. Why? Because He doesn't feel the need to defend himself. He doesn't. God doesn't feel the need to defend himself. Why? Because fairness is not one of His values. What is? Grace. You see, God – He's beyond fair. He's way beyond fair – He's gracious. Why? Because He tells us in this text and throughout the Scriptures, but in particular in this text, "Habakkuk, it's not about the tool – it's about the grace of me loving you." Babylonians? They're a tool. And God says, "They're a tool that I chose, and I don't feel the need to defend it, I don't feel the need to explain it. The reality is, I did it, just like I chose the Nation of Israel. Just like I chose Jacob over Esau. Just like I chose David over a score of other kings. Just like I told David, 'You're not gonna build the temple. Your son's gonna build the temple.'" The reality is, it's not that God is indifferent and it's certainly not that He's not loving – oh no no, He's gracious. But here's His point. "Habakkuk, it's not about the tool – it's about you. If you get hung up on the tool, you're in trouble, because then you're going to demand that only tools more righteous than you can touch your heart." See, that was Habakkuk's statement. Do you go back and look at that? "Why are you silent about the wicked that swallow up those more righteous than themselves" of which – ha ha – he put himself in the camp. What was his point? "God, it IS about the tool! And if

you're gonna discipline me, you better use a righteous person. If you're gonna lead me, you better be a person of my own approval. And if you're going to instruct me, then you better use a person who has sinned less than me."

You ever struggle with that? You ever been angry at God that He uses somebody that is more of a sinner than you to correct you? Oh, how disgusting! "God – I mean, why would you do that?" Because God's not interested in fairness – He's interested in you. His interest is absolutely in you. He's interested in the grace of loving you. He's interested in the grace of being kind to you. He's interested in the passion of what? Reshaping your heart. And at some level, God says, "I'm gonna use the tool that I best think will get me there." What does the passage in Romans tell us? God has foreordained us – to what? To the image of His Son. God's passion for my life is the same as for your life, and that is – He is shaping you right now in this moment to look like Christ, and God is willing to use virtually any tool accessible to Him to – what? Craft you. Why? Because He hates you? No. He has a vision for you. And when He looks at your heart and when He looks at your life, He sees something that you and I don't even see on our best day. He doesn't say to Habakkuk, "Let me defend the reason I chose them." No. "Habakkuk, you don't deserve to be loved, but I love you. You don't deserve the kindness of God, but I'm gonna give it to you. You don't deserve my gracious blessing, but I'm gonna bless you, and I'm gonna form you into the image of my son, and I'm gonna make you a nation that fulfills the vision that I have for you. It's not about the tool – it's about my love for you. It's about how kind I can be. But it's also not about what you see, it's the grace of revelation." What does Habakkuk see? He sees a nation that's struggling, and he sees the impending evil of the Babylonians that are getting ready to swallow him up.

When you look into your future, what do you see? Do you see a righteous platform leading us? Do you see the church thriving in America? Do you see evangelism going everywhere? Do you see abortions being reduced to a miniscule number of zero? Or do you see not only our funding of abortion in this country expand, but now we've committed to fund the abortions around the world? What do you see? And if that's what you see, and that's what's happened, you look at that and go – "WOW! We have righteousness leading us. This is gonna be our best day." What do you see? Do you look to the future? Do you like where we're at? Or do you feel sad? Disheartened? Discouraged? God says to Habakkuk, "It's not about what you see. It's the grace of revelation." Habakkuk chapter two, verse two, "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets." What's He gonna tell him? "I'm gonna tell you the future, Habakkuk. I'm gonna resolve some of your tension. But write it down." What do we call this? It's revelation. This is special revelation. What's general revelation? General revelation is that you could look at the heavens and the earth and tell that there is a glorious and divine God. Romans chapter one. You can look at general revelation, the body, all of creation, and it will tell you that there is a God who is a designer who's a creator who has volition and choice. But this is not general revelation – this is special revelation. What's the difference? Special revelation gives us insight into

who God is, how He operates, what the future looks like, how we get saved. And this is where He comes to Habakkuk, and He says, "I want you to write it down and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. You see, it's not gonna be just for you, and it's not even gonna be just for your people. It's gonna be for down the road." It's you and me, friends. He's talking now about us. You see, it's not about what you see. What you see on any given day – well, you might come to the wrong conclusion! You might come to the conclusion that God doesn't know what He's doing! You might come to the conclusion that things are out of control. "Habakkuk, write it down. I'm gonna tell you about the future. I'm gonna tell you what's gonna happen. For the revelation awaits an appointed time. It speaks of the end. It lets you know how the story ends and it will not prove false. Though it may linger, wait for it. It will certainly come and it will not delay."

In the Scriptures, in John chapter 15, Jesus calls you a particular name. He says that you are his friend. And one of the attributes of things that are – if you have a friend, is that friends tell each other secrets. They do. You think of your best friend, and I'll guarantee you they've told you things that they haven't told anyone else. Why? Because you're a friend. No one looks at that and says, "Well, that's not fair!" We don't attribute that to friendship, do we? We don't say that whatever you have shared with your friend, you, to be fair, have to share with everyone else! That's the point. Friendship is not under the weight of proving fairness. And revelation is not under the weight of proving fairness. God says, "I consider you a friend. And I am gonna share things with you that I'm not gonna share with the rest of the world." Like what? Like what He shared with us in 1 Peter chapter five, verse four, "And then, the chief shepherd shall appear and when he comes he will bring a crown of glory for those who have trusted him." He shares things like, in Revelation chapter seven, verse 17, he says, "For the lamb who is in the center of the throne, he will come, and he will lead us to streams of living water and he will come and wipe away every tear from our eye." See – if you understand this text, it's not a list of dos and don'ts. It's the secrets of a God who calls you a friend. What He's telling you is about the end. What He's telling you is that evil is gonna be judged. What He's telling you is that the righteous will be sustained. What He's telling you is that death will be swallowed up. What He's telling you is that those who die in Christ will live forever. See, if you think of it that way, God lets you in on some secrets. And no one would say, "That's not fair." Friends do that. "Habakkuk, it's not about what you see. It's the grace of revelation."

What is stronger today in your heart -- what's happening right now or the revelation that God has given to you? What is more defining in the way you love – how you're being treated, or the grace of revelation? What is more influential in the joy meter of your own heart – the news of today or the secret of the Holy Spirit? You see, how would you ever measure those with fairness? You can't. That's why God's not interested in fairness. He says it's not about – it's just not about what you see. It's about the grace of revelation, and it's not about their high position. It's the grace of God's strong position. What does He promise Habakkuk? It's this – "For the revelation awaits an appointed

time; it speaks of the end and it will not prove false." It will not prove false. Faith is what God calls us to. Because He goes on, and He says, "For the revelation awaits an appointed time and it speaks of the end. It will linger, it will wait. But certainly, it will come without delay." Verse four. "See, he's puffed up; his desires are not upright – but the righteous will live by faith." What faith? Let me suggest this – it's the faith to believe in the intent and good will of God, that He loves you. And He may use a reprobate to do it, but if they are correcting you and if God is doing something and He's shaping you and He is molding you, don't be surprised that God uses somebody less righteous than you to do a good work in your life. I know it's gonna be hard – it is for me. Because I want it to be fair. If I'm gonna be corrected, I want it to be from somebody who's – well, righteous. I don't want it to be somebody who snorts cocaine. I mean, who are you to tell me how to live my life? I don't want it to be from somebody whose marriage is on the rocks. I mean, after all, if somebody's gonna speak to me about my marriage, daresay, it needs to come from somebody who has a great marriage, correct? I mean, who are you to talk to me! Right? It's not about their position. It's about God's strong position. And it's this – that "When I give the revelation, when I speak, when I bring the Holy Spirit and when He speaks to your heart, it's not about the tool. It's about me loving you." It's the faith of the intent of God. It's the faith in His distribution, his modality, how He comes to us. It's the faith in His timing. And it's the faith in His reward.

I've often been struck by Hebrews 11:6 -- such a great passage. "Without faith it is impossible to please God because" – what? "For those who believe you must believe" – what? That God exists, and that, number two, He's a rewarder of those who trust Him and love Him. It's impossible to please God without faith. What must I believe? I must believe, "God, you exist," and I must believe that "you reward." What is that? It's a secret. You want to please God? Oh, I do. We all do in this room. I believe. You wouldn't be here if you didn't wanna please God! Here's what it means – it's to believe that He exists and to believe that He will make it right in the end. He's a rewarder of those who trust Him. And He is a consequential distributor of those who don't trust Him. That's not because He's evil, it's because He's good. It's not about a person's high position. It's not about the strength of the Babylonians. It's not about this person who's coming to you. It's about the grace of God's strong position. Is God fair? No. If He was fair, you and I'd be dead. He's more than fair – He's gracious.

I was talking to a young man by the name of Mark. Not me. He was 21, in the middle of college. He was engaged. And he walked out of a restaurant with a group of friends in Denver and he was jumped. They beat him up – severe concussion – and he wakes up in the hospital a week later. Fair? The guys who jumped him – they didn't get caught. They've never paid a dime, they've never served a day in jail. He had to drop out of college, he had to suspend his wedding, and he had to be fed as if he was a one-year-old. God, where are you? That was a question Mark asked. I don't blame him – I would ask it. Four years it took him to work through recovery to walk, to feed himself. He said, "I developed what they call 'pain syndrome.' It is the not only acknowledgment of pain, but it is the need of pain. And it is an enduring thing where

you get committed to the pain. It becomes your identity. It becomes your value system. It defines you.” Mark is in his fifties today. Not a hint of regret or anger. Not an ounce of question – “God, why me?” It’s not about fairness. It’s about God’s grace. It’s about how God would take a man through the most unfair, grotesque beating, strip everything away from that guy’s life that he loved, and build him into the kind of man today that is the most God-honoring, vision-oriented, loving man – and, his girlfriend stayed with him. That’s the good part of the story. But was it a long journey? Yes. Did he have to release the pain? Yes. But today he never asks, “God, are you fair?” Because he’s too concerned with God’s grace. I hope all of us, whatever our journey is, can get there.

Is God fair? I don’t think it’s a question He even wants to wrestle with. Why? Because He tells you, “For it is by grace that you’ve been saved through faith. And this is not of yourself. It is the gift of God so that no one can boast.” God’s not fair – He’s gracious.

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