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HCC Sermon
Habakkuk 2:1-20

Living by Faith

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: The UK in the 19th century engaged in the wicked practice of coffin ships.
2. Need: We experience the effects of wickedness in the world.
3. Subject: How should believers respond when they experience the effects of wickedness?
4. Text: Habakkuk 2:1-20
5. Preview:
 - a. When will God judge the wicked?
 - b. How should we respond when we experience the effects of wickedness?
 - c. Why can we be confident that God will judge the wicked?

BODY

- I. The countdown to God's judgment of the wicked has begun (2:1-3)
 - A. God responds to the waiting Habakkuk that judgment of the wicked is coming (2:1-3)
 1. Habakkuk waits for God's response to his complaint (2:1)
 2. God sends Habakkuk to proclaim his response (2:2)
 3. Response: The judgment of the wicked is coming (2:3)
 - B. Warn others that God's judgment of the wicked is coming
- II. While the wicked resist God's rule, the righteous submit to God's rule living by faith (2:4-5)
 - A. God describes the wickedness of the Chaldeans (2:4a, 5)
 1. Motivation: The wicked resist God's rule because of their pride (2:4a)
 2. Image: God uses wine to describe the pride of the wicked (2:5)
 - B. God describes the righteous (2:4b)
 1. The righteous have a covenantal relationship with God
 2. The righteous trust God's just character (Exod 20:5)
 3. The righteous submit to God's rule by living out their faith.
 - C. Live by faith despite experiencing the effects of wickedness
 1. We entered a relationship with God by faith (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11)
 2. We continue relationship with God by faith (Heb 10:28)
- III. The refusal of the wicked to submit to God's rule causes God's judgment (2:6-20)
 - A. God judges the wicked Chaldeans for their refusal to submit to his rule (2:6-20) (He points out 5 pieces of evidence)
 - B. The Chaldeans worshiped idols rather than God (2:18-20)
 - C. People refuse to submit to God's rule because they prefer idols.
 - D. Identify your idols before they cause your ruin.

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: While the wicked resist God's rule, the righteous submit to God's rule living by faith.
2. Closing Image: Samuel Plimsoll ended the practice of coffin ships.

MANUSCRIPT

In the mid-19th century, you would not want to be a sailor in Great Britain. It was a dangerous job. Shady ship owners tried to maximize their profits by overloading their ships. These ships often sank in bad weather. You might think: Oh no! But the ship owners had insurance policies on these ships. This allowed them to make an even greater profit. Let me share with you how bad this practice was. In the year 1873-74 around the coastline of the United Kingdom, 411 ships sank and 506 people died. Overloading and poor repair made some ships so dangerous that they received the nick name: "coffin ships". Some sailors refused to work on these "coffin ships". When they failed to show up for work, the owners threw them in prison for desertion. It was unjust for ship owners to overload their ships and force sailors to work on them. One might call such activity: wicked.

One might think we are past such wicked and unjust behavior. But we know this to be untrue. Wicked behavior continues to exist. We experience the effect of such wicked behavior. A construction company decides to cut corners by using sub-par concrete in an apartment complex. This causes the complex to collapse killing people. Wicked. A hiring manager elicits sexual favors from a potential employee. Wicked. Someone intentionally plasters themselves at a party and decides to get behind the wheel. They end up crashing into another car killing a mother and child. Wicked. A corporate leader cashes out on the company before the financial report comes out revealing its bankruptcy. This results in hundreds of people losing their jobs. Wicked. I could probably go on. But you get in the point. We live in a world where we experience the effects of wickedness. Injustice. Evil.

This prompts us to ask: Where is God in all this? Why does he allow such wickedness to happen? We want to put God in the dock, so that he can explain to us his reasoning. This fall's sermon series is addressing this topic of theodicy. How is God just to allow such evil to exist? Last week, we learned that evil is not beyond his control. But he can use evil to accomplish his sovereign purposes. Nothing is outside of God's control.

Sure. If we believe God is in control even as we experience wickedness, then what are we supposed to do? Some lost family members in the apartment building collapse. A person has trauma from an instance of sexual harassment. A husband lost a wife and child to drunk driving. A person lost their job and is no longer able to pay the bills. It still hurts. It still grieves our hearts. What should we do? **How should believer respond when they experience the effects of wickedness?**

To answer this question, we'll return to the book of Habakkuk. Thank you, John, for your reading of God's word. We'll be in Habakkuk, chapter 2. If you have your bible and haven't turned there already, please join me there. Habakkuk, chapter 2. It's after the book of Nahum and before Zephaniah. Habakkuk, chapter 2.

If you recall from last week's message, Habakkuk served as a prophet in the land of Judah serving under the reign of Jehoiakim. All around him, he sees injustice. Wickedness. Judges pervert justice. The oppressed remain oppressed. The oppressor goes free. Government officials issue high taxes fattening their wallets while citizens go hungry. Injustice. Habakkuk asks: How long, O Lord? God responds. I see the injustice in your society. I know the widow who received unfair treatment. I see how government officials abuse their authority. I will send the Chaldeans to destroy Judah in judgment. Habakkuk receiving the response issues another

complaint. Wait a second. The Chaldeans? They're worse than us. How can you use them as an instrument of judgment. Habakkuk waits then for God to respond again.

This brings us to this morning's text. We'll answer three questions. First, when will God judge the wicked? When will this judgment come? Second, how should we respond when we experience the effects of wickedness? What should we do? Third, why can we be confident that God will judge the wicked? What gives us the assurance that the wicked will receive their just deserts?

Let's answer the first question. When will God judge the wicked? What is the timetable? What is the schedule?

The countdown to God's judgment of the wicked has begun. God has already started the timer. The clock has been set. It has started to tick down. As each day passes, God's judgment draws closer. It's coming. **The countdown to God's judgment has begun.**

This is the response of God. God answers Habakkuk. The judgment of the wicked will come. It is on the way.

The text begins with Habakkuk waiting for God's reply. 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.* Note where Habakkuk goes. He goes to a watch post. As he overlooks the city of Jerusalem. He waits. He can't force God to respond quickly. He knows that God will reply. It's just a matter of time. Even the simple act of waiting displays a trust in God.

We don't know how much time passes, but God does reply. God begins with a command. Habakkuk will take this response to others. He will relay this message to the people.

God sends Habakkuk to proclaim his response. Look at verse 2. *And the LORD answered me: Write this vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.* Now the phrase: “so he may run who reads it” sounds of odd. What does the Lord mean by run? In ancient times, people would send messages by heralds. Heralds would run into the town square to make a royal announcement. God appoints Habakkuk to serve as his herald to proclaim this message.

But when will this message be fulfilled? When will God’s judgment occur. Look at verse 3. *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.* Judgement is imminent. Everything that will occur in the God’s previous response and subsequent response will occur soon. **Judgment of the wicked is coming.** We don’t know the exact time when God’s judgment will occur. But we need to wait for it.

Before judgment comes though, God sends Habakkuk to warn the people. Habakkuk must prepare the people for what is to come. And as Jason and Stan referenced, the Babylonians would indeed come to destroy Judah for their disobedience in 586 B.C.

If judgment for the wicked came for Judah in 586 B.C, then what does it have to do with us? This doesn’t resolve the issue that wickedness still exists today. All judgment in the world serves as a precursor of a future judgment. The flood, the plagues, famines, even Israel’s exile foreshadows the day when Jesus Christ will return to the earth. When Jesus returns, he will sit on his throne of judgment. He will sentence the wicked to eternal destruction.

But as we wait, we have a task. Believers are heralds. God entrusts us with the same message to take into the world. **Warn others that the judgment of God is coming.** Tell people of the destruction that awaits them if they persist in their wicked deeds. But it also brings hope

to the oppressed. It brings hope to victimized. It brings relief to the grieving. For God will punish the oppressor, abuser, and the haughty. No one will get away with evil. When will this judgment coming? Soon. The countdown has begun.

What do we do as we wait? This brings us to the second question. How should we respond when we experience the effects of wickedness? What do we do?

We know that judgment of wickedness is coming. But there are two types of people who will respond to this message. The wicked. The righteous. The rebellious. The loyal. Each responds differently.

The wicked resist God's rule, while the righteous submit to God's rule living by faith.

The rebellious continue to rebel. The loyal remain faithful. The wicked will persist in doing evil disbelieving any future judgment. The righteous though will persist obeying God even though wickedness exists. **While the wicked resist God's rule, the righteous submit to God's rule living by faith.**

Let's see first what God says about the wicked Chaldeans. God describes two aspects of the wicked Chaldeans. He first explains the reason for the Chaldean's wicked behavior. He then uses an image to describe them.

What is the reason for the Chaldean's wicked behavior? What motivates them to maim and destroy? Pride. **The Chaldeans resist God's rule because of their pride.** Look at the first half of verse 4. *Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him.* The Chaldeans are full of themselves. They boast in their achievements. They defeated the Assyrians. They defeated the Egyptians. Who can stop the might of the Chaldean military? What God can save a people from our might? This prompts them to resist God's rule. They don't need to follow God's design

for their lives. They don't live by the adage: love your neighbor as yourself. They live by the philosophy: Might makes right! Do not steal? We take what we want. Do not murder? We kill who we want. The Chaldeans believing in their superiority did not living according to God's rule.

Pride motivates the Chaldean's behavior. Second description. **God uses the image of wine to describe them.** Look at verse 5. *Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he never has enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples.*

The ancient world knew of the Chaldean's fondness for drink. When a person drinks excessively it removes inhibition and increases wicked behavior. Strong drink amplifies pride. Drunk people act selfishly taking what they want without regarding the thoughts of others. The Chaldeans like a drunk person will continue to take and plunder the nations. For as death can never have enough lives, the Chaldeans can never have enough land. Things will get worse before they get better.

The Lord provides a description of the wicked Chaldeans. They will rampage across the ancient world. But what about the righteous? What do they do?

God provides a description of the righteous in the latter half of verse 4. *But the righteous shall live by faith.* We'll spend some time meditating on this phrase.

First, who are the righteous? Are they ones who do good? Are they the ones who pull over when they see an accident to help? Are they the ones who spends their weekends helping the local food bank? Are they the ones who always get their work on time? Nope. When the Bible talks about the righteous, it refers to people in right relationship with God. **The righteous have a covenantal relationship with God.**

How did Israel enter a covenant relationship with God? If you recall back in the book of Exodus, Israel believed God after he helped them cross the Red Sea (Exod 14:31). And just for those of you who are thinking: wait a minute I thought they became God's people when they received the law. You have a few more chapters before God gives Israel the law. This means that even before Israel received God's law, God considered them his people because he saved them from destruction. Israel entered a relationship with God by believing that God had saved them and would save them.

The righteous have a relationship with God. He is their king. They are his subjects. He is their savior. They are the rescued. What else should we know about the righteous?

The righteous trust in God's character. They believe in who God is. In the context of wickedness, a righteous person trusts in God's just character. What does it mean for God to be just? When we think of justice, we think of a judge sitting in a courtroom. He hears the argument from the prosecutor and defendant. He evaluates the positions and renders the best possible judgment.

That partially describes God's justice. Let's think a minute about God's justice. First, God created the world. He is the creator. As the creator, he has the authority to determine right from wrong. He creates the rules so to speak. Since God created the rules, he also judges according to the rules. But God cannot compare to any human judge. A human judge is limited by his intellect. His ability to reason. His knowledge of the law. But God has no limits. He doesn't need evidence because wherever the crime was committed, he was there. He's there when a murderer decides to kill a victim. He's there when a person types in the command to embezzle funds from the company. Not only is God present, but he also knows the motivations

of the wickedness. He knows what the murderer thinks when he takes a life. He knows what the thief thinks when he steals. Not only knows the crime and the motivation, he also knows the punishment that fits the crime. Human judges approximate justice. This sentence best fits the crime. 10 years in prison. A fine. Community service. But God knows the perfect sentence every time. This makes God's justice unlike anything we have ever seen or heard of. This makes him holy. Since God is set apart in his justice, the righteous trust that in God's sovereign will that the wicked will receive their just deserts. The wicked will receive their punishment.

This then prompts the righteous to submit to God's rule by living out their faith. They defer to God's judgment. They decide to say: "Yes Lord! Wickedness sucks. Yes. Injustice hurts. Yes. It breaks my heart when I see people mistreated. But I will not take judgment into my hands if I don't receive justice on this this earth. Judgment belongs to you."

Does this mean that a believer should not press charges against a thief? Should a believer not report a murder? Should a believer just allow wickedness to occur?

No. To live out our faith means that we do what is within our power to address the wickedness that we experience. If we can file a police report, then we do so. If we can testify against a crime, then we do so. If we can sue a person rightly for damages, then we do so. But the righteous realize that the results are up to God. If they receive some semblance of justice in human court, then the righteous gives thanks. But if they don't receive justice in the human court of law, then justice has been deferred. For there will be a day when God will ensure justice is done. Until that day, a believer lives out their faith.

Habakkuk's command for righteous Israelites to live faithfully applies to Christians as well. This instruction is not just for the past. It's for the present.

Live by faith despite experiencing the effects of wickedness. We obey God although evil occurs around us. Why is this true for us? This verse Habakkuk 2:4 is cited in three places in the New Testament. Paul cites it in two of his letters. The author of Hebrews cites it once.

One place we find the citation of Habakkuk 2:4 is found in Romans, chapter 1, verse 17. Paul writes: For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." What is Paul saying? He says just as Jews entered a relationship with God through faith. God has made an opportunity through the gospel for gentiles (non-Jews) to have a relationship with God through faith. We can infer this from Romans, chapter 1, verse 16 which says that the gospel is first for the Jews and then the Gentiles.

The second place, where Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4 is Galatians, chapter 3, verse 11. It says: Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for the righteous shall live by faith. How does one become right before God? How does one please God? Is it by following the Law? Do we earn favor with the Lord by doing things? No! Paul writes that the only way that you can have a right relationship with God is through faith. And you experience fellowship with God when live by faith.

One last reference. This is found in Hebrews, chapter 10. Let me set up with the context. The author of Hebrews is talking about a day when Christians will experience suffering. When believers suffer, they may be tempted to give up on Christ. They may think it's not worth it. The author of Hebrews then writes verse 37 to 38. *For, Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay, but my righteous one shall live by faith and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.* Jesus will return to make things right. But before then, the people of

God will live by faith. But if a person fails to live by faith. If give up on God, then they reveal that they never had faith to begin with. God then has no pleasure in them.

Just to summarize. We enter a relationship with God by faith. We continue in fellowship with God by faith. But what does it mean to live by faith?

Faith contains three elements. First, there's the element of knowledge. There's a body of content that we must know. In the case of Christianity, we know that we are wicked people deserving God's wrath. But God saved us from his wrath through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we believe in the work of Christ, then the righteousness of Christ becomes ours while Jesus suffers the penalty for our sin. That's what we need to know. The second element of faith is assent. Do we agree with what we know? Do we believe in it? Do we believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again to save me from my sin? If we believe, then there's a third element of faith. Commitment. We commit ourselves to conduct our lives considering the truth of the gospel. For instance, God commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves. This means that we seek out justice for our neighbors. We provide for their needs when they lose a job. If someone experiences trauma, then we listen to them recount their experience. If a person loses a loved one due to injustice, then we grieve them. But we may also act on their behalf. We may advocate for them so that they might seek out justice. But commitment to the gospel means that we also have hope. We have hope that even if one does not experience justice now, then wicked will receive their due punishment when Christ returns.

So as you experience wickedness around you, do you have faith? Have you believed in what Christ's redeeming work on the cross? If not, then God's judgment will come upon you along with the wicked around you.

Why? Why can I say that? This brings me to the last question. Why can we be confident that God will judge the wicked? What makes me certain that God will punish evildoers?

The wicked refuse to submit to God's rule. They refuse to believe that God will punish them. They think that God doesn't exist. **The refusal of the wicked to submit to God's rule causes God's judgment.** A failure of the wicked to turn from their ways means that God's punishment awaits them. God will not forget their iniquity. There is no place that they can go to escape God's judgment. Even physical death cannot save you from eternal punishment. **The refusal of the wicked to submit to God's rule causes God's judgment.**

God completes his response to Habakkuk with woes. God judges the wicked Chaldeans for their refusal to submit to his rule in the last section. He does this in the form of woes. God utters five woes against the Chaldeans. But I want to spend time on the last one.

Unlike the first four woes where the section begins with a woe, the last one is structured differently. The word: woe occurs in the middle of the section. **God declares a woe on the Chaldeans for their worship of idols.** God points out several things about idols. First, people make idols. Idols are creations not creators. Look at verse 18. *What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its makers trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols!* Note the phrase: teacher of lies. A statue may give off vibes that it has supernatural power. If you rub it, then it'll give you good luck. If you offer incense to it, then you'll receive good grades. But the idol cannot do anything.

Second, God mocks their idols for their muteness. Look at verse 19. *Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold it is overlaid with*

gold and silver, and there is no breath in it. When you speak to an idol, it does not respond to you. It's mute. It has no life in it. It's dead.

Third, God contrasts the idols to himself. All creation will be in awe of him because he will bring judgment upon the earth. Look at verse 20. *But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.* Habakkuk refers to God's temple in Jerusalem. Even though it will be destroyed the Babylonians, it will be raised up again. But it's likely that God foreshadows the new heavens and new earth where God will make his dwelling place among men once again. God has not been removed from his throne. He still sovereignly controls all things. The wicked will be silent before them because they will receive their just deserts. While the righteous will stand before the law in awe of him.

What's the big deal about idols? Many of us do not own idols or carry them around in our bags. But idols are not just physical statues. An idol is anything that is more important to you than God. It absorbs your attention. You must have it. You must get it. For instance, the Bible calls the covetousness – idolatry (Eph 5:3). This means you can make your job, your family, your relationship, your academics, or your hobbies an idol.

Idols deceive you. They tell a lie. If you have me, then you'll be satisfied. If you finally receive this salary, then you'll be satisfied. But you won't. There's always a higher salary to gain. There's more influence to grab hold of. There's always a nicer office. You think if my family will finally acknowledge me, then I'll mean something. You try to excel in your career. But your family doesn't recognize you. You get married. Your family responds: "Meh!" The promise more than then can ever deliver. But these idols make you think: I can't follow God. If I do, then I'll have to give this idol up.

Now what does this have to do with wickedness. People do wicked things because of idols. Someone might idolize wealth. This causes them to put in a lower quality part into a car engine, so that they can pocket the difference. But the engine catches on fire and kills someone. Wicked. Someone might idolize what people think of them. Their supervisor pressures them to change the numbers on a financial report. The company reports higher earnings. But when the truth comes out that the numbers are inflated, it causes stock prices to go down. People who invested in the company for their retirement accounts see their investments reduced to pennies. Wicked. When people prefer idols, they refuse to submit to God's rule. They refuse to acknowledge there is only one king. One ruler. God.

God's judgment awaits those who refuse to give up their idols. If you continue to pursue your idols, then you will experience God's wrath just as the wicked. Identify your idols before they cause your ruin. Give them up. Turn to the Lord in faith. If you do, then you will be counted among the righteous on the day of judgment.

To summarize, what should believers do when they experience the effects of wickedness? **They should live by faith because the countdown to the judgment of the wicked has begun. This judgment is assured because the wicked refuse to submit to God's rule.**

Whatever happen to those coffin ships in the United Kingdom during the 19th century? In 1868, a young British politician named Samuel Plimsoll applied his biblical faith to address the issue of coffin ships. Under his leadership, Parliament passed the 1875 Merchant Shipping Act. This marked the end of for "coffin ships". From that day forth, ships would display a Plimsoll mark. It was a load line painted on the ship's hull depicting how deep they could safely sit in the water and prevent overloading. This practice saved thousands of lives of seaman

caught in an unjust situation. While Plimsoll saved the lives of future sailors, will there be justice for the sea man who lost their lives on prior coffin ships? For those who are believers, we can answer assuredly: "Yes!" The wicked will not escape God's judgment.

As we see and experience the effects of wickedness around us, may the Lord help us do what we can to bring about justice. But if we can't, we anticipate the justice of God.